



Integrating Multimodality
in the study of
Dialogue Interpreting

**IAS workshop report on
“IMDI – Integrating Multimodality in the study of Dialogue Interpreting” research seminar
31 August-1 September 2015
University of Surrey, Guildford, UK**

Overview and objectives

“If spoken language is to be accounted for, this must be in terms of its relationship with other modes of communication”: this quote from Adam Kendon (1990), whose pioneering work laid the theoretical and methodological foundations for contemporary multimodality, perfectly synthesises the rationale for holding “IMDI – Integrating Multimodality in the study of Dialogue Interpreting”, a two-day research seminar co-organised by Dr Elena Davitti and Dr Sabine Braun (Centre for Translation Studies, School of English and Languages, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences) that took place at the University of Surrey on 31 August-1 September 2015.

The research seminar revolved around two key concepts: on the one hand, **multimodality** here refers to a holistic approach to the study of communication which integrates situated (para)linguistic and embodied resources (i.e. verbal resources combined with gestures, gaze, facial expressions, head and body movements). This is based on the insight that the way we communicate is deeply anchored in multimodal practices: we are constantly exposed to, and draw on, multiple modes of communication (visual, aural, haptic) to make sense of situations, create meaning and co-construct interaction. Multimodal resources can strongly influence the dynamics of coordination and participation in interaction, particularly in an age where digital technologies have provided new forms of communication which have rapidly reshaped our semiotic landscape. On the other hand, **Dialogue Interpreting (DI)** refers to a key communication practice facilitating business

negotiations, diplomacy, court proceedings, healthcare communication and other types of institutionalised talk in the globalised age. DI as a form of mediated communication is bound to be anchored to multimodal practices. Yet, research on DI has traditionally dealt with meaning as a linguistic product exclusively based on the participants' verbal behaviour, thus neglecting equally important forms of embodied conduct. The integration of embodied resources is therefore key to gaining an enriched perspective and provide for a more comprehensive understanding of nuances that would escape a purely verbal analysis. Nevertheless, while a variety of multimodal approaches, relying on different analytical frameworks, have been developed for monolingual communication, there is no systematicity in the way this analysis is conducted on interpreter-mediated interaction.

Building on the conceptualisation of Dialogue Interpreting as a form of *multimodal* communication, the seminar addressed the **urgent need to develop novel, rigorous and holistic research methods** to account for the variety of integrated (verbal, visual, aural, embodied and spatial) resources employed to co-construct meaning in interpreter-mediated interaction. **Multimodality in DI** is an **emerging area of enquiry** which requires theoretical and empirical explorations from a variety of disciplines in order to develop solid methodological bases that can underpin its investigation and ensure the conceptual robustness of the outcomes. The seminar aimed, in particular, to **map out a research agenda** that identified key research questions and methodologies, drawing and elaborating upon existing knowledge of how multimodality has been conceptualised and implemented in different ways in a number of different disciplines and research communities: how can linguistic, visual and aural resources be integrated more systematically in the study of DI? How can multimodal methods be applied to DI? What are the affordances and constraints of applying a multimodal approach to the study of DI? What concepts and methods of multimodality do we have now and how are they used to analyse communication? How can a multimodal approach to DI inform the design of communication tools?

Our plan to hold the seminar was firmly rooted in our belief that exploring these issues can have important **implications for both practice and research in interpreting**. In particular, the multimodal turn in Interpreting Studies advocated through the seminar can contribute to enhancing awareness of the importance of spaces, contexts, materials, actors and technologies of DI, thus ultimately **enriching the current paradigm** which has paved the way for the recognition of DI as a field of enquiry in its own right. Through this innovative look at DI, the workshop constituted an important way of **engaging with key areas of public concern** (such as institutional communication with migrants in public service settings) and **contributing to increasingly efficient communication in professional contexts**. This is even more pressing in the light of the widespread

use of digital communication technologies, which have brought about new modalities of interpreting (e.g. video-mediated interpreting) acting as a catalyst for new configurations of DI across a range of communicative encounters. Looking at these new types of mediated interaction through multimodal lenses can ultimately inform the design of the underlying communication tools so as to cater for the presence of an interpreter and better support bilingual communication. Furthermore, the **cross-fertilization among disciplines** encouraged by this workshop represented a first step towards **bridging the gap between** two interpreting modalities which have too long been considered as separate disciplines, i.e. **sign and spoken language interpreting**, with interesting implications for interpreter education.

We felt that this seminar was a timely event to take stock of what has been achieved so far and work towards the **advancement of research methods in DI** by setting the ground for novel, multimodal approaches to the collection, transcription and analysis of enriched datasets. In particular, the seminar provided a space for critical reflection and scholarly exchange between researchers and practitioners from different contexts and backgrounds, which was testament to how **interdisciplinarity** can enrich our view of such this socially important practice and provide new opportunities for synergy and collaboration.

Participants

The event was not only highly interdisciplinary, but also truly **international**: it was attended by 32 participants from 10 countries (UK, Spain, Italy, Belgium, Finland, Sweden, Norway, France, Austria, Switzerland). The seminar featured a variety of national and international speakers and presenters, from well-established scholars and researchers with expertise in a number of research areas interconnected via the thread of multimodality (interpreting, communication, welfare, health science, theatre, ICTs) to practitioners interested in the impact and practical implications of this innovative approach to interpreter-mediated interaction. In terms of format, the event proceeded through two keynote speeches, three thematic sessions for a total of ten presentations and a final round table.

Key themes and summary of presentations

The seminar opened with one presentation on “Current and future themes in the study of interpreter-mediated interaction” delivered by **Cecilia Wadensjö** (Stockholm University), i.e. the scholar who initiated the academic study of this practice. This talk had the purpose of ‘setting the scene’ and was originally meant to be complemented by a second one on the potential of multimodal analysis to be

delivered by the scholar who first adopted a truly holistic approach to authentic monolingual interaction (Lorenza Mondada, University of Basel). The latter unfortunately did not take place as the speaker had to cancel last minute due to illness. The seminar then proceeded through three thematic strands:

- A. Multimodal analysis of face-to-face dialogue interpreting
- B. Bridging the gap between different types of dialogue interpreting
- C. Multimodal analysis of ICT-supported dialogue interpreting

Each strand benefited from presentations delivered by national and international scholars, both invited and selected via the open call for papers. Thematic strand A opened with **Claudio Bendazzoli**'s paper (University of Turin), which explored the interface between theatrical training and interpreter education, focusing in particular on how raising students' awareness towards paralanguage and kinesics can improve the interpreting performance and inform the multimodal dimension of interpreting research. **Eloísa Monteolivo García** (Heriot-Watt University) presented some preliminary findings from ongoing research based on authentic interpreter-mediated interaction in police settings, placing emphasis on how a micro-analytical multimodal approach can shed light on the impact of gaze trajectories on sense-making and participation processes in complex multilingual events. **Charlotta Plejert** (Linköping University) presented results from a study on several embodied resources mobilised by participants in interpreter-mediated dementia assessment sessions, showing how multimodal analysis can illuminate the collaborative nature of such activity, with important implications for clinical and diagnostic practices. Thematic strand B comprised presentations aiming to reduce the gap which traditionally exists between spoken and sign language interpreting through multimodality. **Jemina Napier** (Heriot-Watt University) opened the session with an overview of studies on sign-language interpreting, whose investigation has traditionally required the adoption of a multimodal approach, with a view to building on that body of research to develop multimodal approaches suitable to the analysis of face-to-face interpreter-mediated interaction. **Robert Lee** (University of Central Lancashire) presented examples of how sign-language interpreters rely on embodied resources in their decision-making process and how they employ such resources to ensure successful communication. **Liisa Tittula** (University of Helsinki) focused on turn-taking dynamics in a very specific and underresearched form of communication, i.e. "speech-to-text" interpreting, which is fundamental to giving hearing-impaired people access to spoken communication. Finally, thematic strand C, which was focused on the analysis of ICT-supported DI, started with **Jelena Vranjes**'s (KU Leuven) investigation of gaze behaviour when providing and eliciting feedback in interpreter-mediated psychotherapeutic

encounters through mobile eye-tracking technology, i.e. a method which allows for great granularity and analytical depth. **Magdalena Fernández Pérez** (University of La Laguna) connected with the seminar from Spain through videoconference to discuss the importance of multimodality in remote interpreting by telephone, particularly how interpreters use auditory information to “decode” semiotic resources used in communication. **Camilla Warnicke** (Linköping University) then focused on another form of ICT-supported interpreting, namely Video Relay Interpreting between people using sign and spoken language, focusing on how interpreters orient to their headset during the call and what implications this can have of talk organisation. Last but not least, **Christian Licoppe** (Telecom Paristech) used authentic data gathered during bilingual courtroom hearings in order to tackle a very important question in video-mediated interpreting, i.e. how to show the interpreter on screen and what implications this has on participation dynamics.

Day two was initially devoted to two presentations from staff at CTS (Centre for Translation Studies), who focused on findings and observations from projects led by the department where multimodality is a key dimension. To start with, **Sabine Braun and Elena Davitti** addressed several questions emerging in relation to video-mediated remote interpreting in police settings (using data collected as part of the European-funded AVIDICUS projects), namely how the combined analysis of verbal and embodied resources can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of interpreters’ performance and how issues related to the set-up of the technical equipment used impact on the communicative dynamics in the video-mediated interaction. **Sara Dicterio** explored the usefulness of a multimodal framework for analysing how specific interactional challenges were handled by students practising in different virtual learning environments including a videoconference-based environment and a 3D virtual world (using data collected as part of the European-funded EVIVA project). The seminar culminated in a round table led by **Claudia Angelelli** (Heriot-Watt University) and **Franz Pöchacker** (University of Vienna), who wrapped up the key points and ideas generated by the presentations, identifying common strands and formulating questions to stimulate critical thinking. The round table was open to all attendees and triggered a highly interesting discussion particularly focused on the way forward, i.e. what needs to be done in order to consolidate the research methods by the various presenters and achieve true progress in the multimodal analysis of DI. Last but not least, the second part of day two united the invited speakers and organisers, and consisted in a hands-on data session led by **Sergio Pasquandrea** (University of Perugia), during which multimodal, micro-analytical methods were tested on authentic video-recorded interpreter-mediated data. The session served as a springboard for further discussion grounded in observation and analysis of real-life material.

To conclude, the seminar provided ample evidence that a multimodal research design is necessary to explore dialogue interpreting dynamics, although its development requires further elaboration and cross-fertilisation of ideas and experience-sharing. As the main organisers of this event, we believe that the seminar contributed to strengthening the position of CTS in this emerging research area. All participants praised the extended seminar format entirely devoted to multimodality and dialogue interpreting, which represented a unique (and, therefore, rare) opportunity for a stimulating and focused discussion. There was great satisfaction with the outcomes among academics and practitioners alike, which led to participants calling for a follow-up event in the near future to keep track of further development in this emerging area. A proposal for a panel to continue the work initiated with the IMDI research seminar has been recently put forward within the framework of the forthcoming Critical Link 8 conference (“Critical LinkS – a new generation”, June 2016), i.e. the most prestigious international conference which is held every three years and has greatly contributed to the advancement of the field of DI. Outputs based on the research seminars are currently being explored in the form of publications. The main organiser (Dr Elena Davitti) will develop a conceptual paper to set out the main concepts and questions and a research agenda for a multimodal turn in Interpreting Studies. Workshop participants will remain in contact with a view to future collaborations and to the establishment of an international expertise network, which is already in the making.

Acknowledgements

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Reference

Kendon, A.(1990) *Conducting Interaction: Patterns of behavior in focused encounters*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Quotes from participants

- Wonderful conference! Thanks for starting this community.
- I have found the seminar very focused, the presentations very relevant and the format really works. And I love the logo! Congratulations.
- Thanks for a great and inspiring event. The whole seminar was organised very well and ran smoothly in a good atmosphere. It was easy to join the event with the senior experts and I felt at home with the approach.
- The topic is very relevant to my work and the programme was very interesting. Great speakers!
- From a practitioner's perspective and as a recent graduate, it was all very fascinating. I enjoyed the different topics and have been left with much to contemplate.