

Elwys de Stefani

ON CONTRAST AND COMPARISON IN INTERACTIONAL LINGUISTICS

Keywords Interactional Linguistics; language comparison; multimodality; situated action

Interactional Linguistics (IL) regards language as a resource for, and, concomitantly, as an epiphenomenon of social interaction. Accordingly, language is studied as it unfolds *hic et nunc* in social encounters, alongside other modes of communication, such as gesture.

As a consequence, comparative approaches to interaction face the sensitive problem of having to determine *which phenomena* to compare and *on which grounds*. For instance, the comparison might focus on specific social actions (e.g., instructions), grammatical formats (e.g., if/then clauses), referential practices (e.g., pointing), etc. in similar settings of interaction across different communities. In this talk, I discuss the methodological and theoretical challenges of comparative studies as carried out by interactional approaches rooted in Conversation Analysis (CA). With their thoroughly empiricist and inductive method, CA and IL examine the multimodal practices interactants display in mutually understandable ways. However, the situated complexity and semiotic richness of face-to-face encounters occasions considerable variation and hence makes comparison difficult. By highlighting different possible orders of comparison, I offer an overview of contrastive and comparative perspectives in CA and IL while addressing at the same time methodological questions currently discussed in the field (e.g., on coding, quantification, and analytical labels).