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Cooperating hands: Gesture as an interactional semiotic resource in collective ideation

Cooperating on problem solving and finding new innovative solutions are crucially important parts of many aspects of human culture, commercial activities and societal development today. In studying these issues, great attention has been given to the role of spoken and written language. Less emphasis however, has been given other kinds of embodied and external aspects of communication in collaboration, such as gesture, prosody and material representations, as well as how these different semiotic resources are drawn upon and influence sense making in joint problem solving.

Gestures are most often researched as to how they function as either 1) a speaker resource for speech production, word search, and reasoning or 2) an addressee resource for making sense of speaker produced talk in interaction. Here we propose a view of gesture that adds to this research how gesture in face to face interaction has a temporal resolution and a functionality that reaches beyond the intelligibility and production of the single word or utterance with which it was produced, and thus become a resource for tying, manipulating and exploring parts of ongoing sense making. This proposes a view of gesture as a shared interactional semiotic resource, rather than an individual resource for production and understanding.

Drawing on micro-analysis of natural data from a client meeting in a digital marketing company, we show how both speaker and addressee reuse parts of prior gestures to add to, reiterate and transform a rich, enacted proposition produced in face to face interaction, thereby co-creating a new perspective on a shared task.