

POSTPRINT

CHAPTER 2

Data and methods used in the study of OKAY across languages

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In this chapter, we overview the specificity of comparisons made within the perspective of Conversation Analysis (CA), and we position them in relation to other fields. We introduce the analytical mentality, methodology, and procedures of CA, and we show how we used it for the analysis of OKAY in this volume.

Keywords: comparison, data, transcription, recording, multimodality, sequentiality, context

1. Comparing languages and language use across cultures

Comparison has been at the core of the linguistic enterprise since the very beginning of its history: in diachronic linguistics, one state of a language is compared to another state; in anthropological linguistics, the language of one culture is compared to the language of another. Even within a definition of language as “un ensemble où tout se tient” (Meillet 1903, x), i.e., a system where every element is related to all the others, structural linguistics identifies and combines minimal units on the basis of similarities and differences. Comparison is omnipresent in linguistic analysis. Yet it is implemented through very different analytical procedures and concerns very different objects (from phonemes to words and syntactic constructions, from speech acts to interactional practices).

Comparative studies have classically focused on formal resources (phonology, morphology, lexicon, syntax), and much less on actions and interactional practices, although it is possible to find some precursors for these fields as well.

Comparisons have been at the core of linguistic anthropology from Franz Boas (1889) onward, grounding relativity theories and controversies about the diversity versus universality of language structures. Building on Humboldt’s thoughts about the close connection between world-view and the structure of languages (Humboldt 1836) and on writings of his teacher Edward Sapir, himself a student of Boas, Benjamin Lee Whorf’s studies of the Hopi language (Whorf 1956) led him

to the conclusion that the Hopi have a concept of time that is completely different from that of Western cultures. He based this conclusion on the fact that he did not find linguistic forms in Hopi devoted to the expression of temporal properties. Thus, so-called “linguistic relativism” – claiming that cognitive conceptualization of actions, events, and objects essentially rests on the affordances yielded by the lexical and grammatical structure of the individual language of the thinker – ultimately rests on comparison between languages. While this claim exists in different versions and is far from being undisputed (see, e.g., Lucy 1997), comparative approaches have also led into the opposite direction. Starting with Greenberg’s *Universals of Language* (1963), linguistic typology has looked for universal properties of languages whose origins are unrelated and whose surface systems are organized in very different ways (e.g., synthetic vs. analytic coding of meaning in grammar). Earlier typological research was mainly interested in universal rules of word order and morphological properties. More recent approaches adopt a functional and cognitive perspective. They try to show how the syntactic, morphological, and lexical options of different languages are used to express universal cognitive categories like animacy, causation, and thematic roles, and how linguistic structure can be explained by reference to general human cognitive capacities (e.g., Comrie 1989).

While typological approaches are interested in the comparison of linguistic systems, pragmatic and interactional approaches compare language use. This ties back to linguistic anthropology, to the interest of Boas in both language and cultural practices, and to the later developments of linguistics inspired by ethnography, sociology, and discourse analysis in the 1970s.

In the 1970s, an interest in action and practices characterized the linguistic approaches focusing on discourse and contexts of language use, using qualitative methods and fieldwork. Ethnography of speaking (Hymes 1972) has proposed an explicit comparative perspective with the SPEAKING model, offering a general list of categories to compare speech events. While much of this research tradition has been interested in ritualistic, ceremonial speech events that are unique to a certain culture (Bauman 1975; Duranti 1997), others have turned to everyday practices, like Frake’s study of how to ask for a drink in Subanon (1964). John Gumperz’ Interactional Sociolinguistics has focused on intercultural encounters in ordinary and institutional settings. At the heart of his theory of contextualization lies the claim that misunderstandings between members of different cultures arise from different contextualization conventions. Gumperz showed how prosodic contours, formulaic speech, and code-switching give rise to different inferences concerning, e.g., the type of action, speaker’s intentions, or emotional stance towards the interlocutor depending on cultural conventions (Gumperz 1982).

This interest in culture-specific interpretations of action was also developed using speech-act theory. For instance, launching cross-cultural politeness research,

Brown and Levinson (1978) compared English with Tzeltal and Tamil, and searched for universal face-concerns and linguistic strategies to manage them in different languages. Within cross-cultural pragmatics, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) and Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) compared the realizations of speech acts like requests and apologies across different languages. At the same time, the usability of speech act theory for comparative research was criticized by linguistic anthropologists like Rosaldo (1982; see also Duranti 1988) questioning the applicability of Searle's categories and typologies of speech acts to other cultures. Moreover, the focus on specific speech acts, rather than cultural practices in actual settings, led Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) to use survey and experimental methodologies, involving questionnaires, interviews, and discourse completion tasks, rather than fieldwork and participant observation.

In anthropology, there have also been early comparative studies on embodied conduct. Examples include David Efron (1941), who compared the gestural behavior of eastern Jews and Italians in New York City – using sketches but also slow motion films – as well as Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, who engaged in cross-cultural studies of bodily practices, comparing ordinary parenting practices in New Guinea, Bali, and the US (such as bathing babies, in Bateson and Mead 1951; see Jacknis 1988). Later on, Edward Hall (1966) researched cultural differences in the ways people position their bodies and manage physical distance, and human ethology researchers sought to identify universal strategies of behavior through cross-cultural comparison (Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1979).

Comparative studies within CA are both inspired by these traditions and propose a distinctive approach. Like studies in linguistic anthropology, CA research is interested in practices observed in naturalistic settings, but unlike many ethnographic studies, it makes systematic use of audio- and video-recordings in order to focus on the details of vocal and bodily conduct. Practices are studied by focusing on practical problems participants have: managing turn-taking, securing and repairing understanding, producing meaningful responses, etc. Rather than focusing on pre-defined singular actions, the focus is on sequential environments in which specific actions can be identified as locally designed for and interpreted by the co-participants. In this framework, the *emic*, rather than the *etic*, definition of action is fundamental, enabling a focus on problems, categories, and meanings that are intelligible and oriented to by the participants themselves.

Thus, in contrast to other approaches in the social sciences and sociolinguistics, comparison in CA does not relate language use to external variables (like gender, age, social class, or ethnicity) and therefore does not formulate its analyses in terms of correlations. The conversation analytic approach, instead, focuses on those pragmatic and contextual properties that participants themselves index to be relevant within their discursive practices – that is, in an emic way. Instances are compared in

order to discover what participants themselves treat as relevant differences, which matter for their conduct and their understanding – for instance asking which contextual features and which resources make a difference for the ways in which an item like OKAY is employed and understood. This comparative procedure leads to a refined and structured collection (Mondada 2005). It includes the identification of generic structures, subtypes, contextual variants, boundary cases (which shade into other practices), and deviant cases (Deppermann 2001, Chapter 6.3). In contrast to statistical procedures, deviant cases are not just outliers which can be discarded. On the contrary, they can be particularly valuable for refining the analysis (ten Have 1998; Schegloff 1968, 2009). They may falsify an analysis and be key for its revision; they may point to conditions for the use of a practice which remain unnoticed in the more routine cases; or they may be particularly strong warrants for the normative character of the practice, if participants sanction, explain, or otherwise account for what appear to be deviant cases.

2. Comparative approaches in conversation analysis

One consequence of CA's focus on how participants engage in local methods to solve fundamental organizational problems is an interest both in formats of actions characterizing specific languages and in important similarities across very different cultures and languages.

For instance, in his study of repair-practices in Tai languages (Thailand), Michael Moerman (1977) was the first to test whether interactive practices which had been identified on the basis of American English data were also used in culturally and linguistically distant communities. Moerman's results highlighted the relationship between basic interactional problems (like the organization of turn-taking and repair) and culture- and language-specific practices to deal with them: "although the problems are generic and the abilities apparently universal, the actual forms that interaction takes are shaped by and adapted to the particular resources that are locally available for their expression" (Sidnell 2009, 4).

Further studies of repair have highlighted similar issues: repair of troubles of hearing as well as troubles of understanding are practices present in all languages, but the way they are implemented is specifically tied to the grammatical constraints and resources of specific languages. For instance, comparing self-repair practices in English and Japanese, Fox, Hayashi, and Jasperson (1996) observe that while Japanese verb inflections have the form of a whole syllable, have a well identified meaning, and are not subject to grammatical agreement, English verb inflections are more closely bound to the verb, do not have a unique meaning, and are subject to agreement. This results in Japanese verb-endings being more readily available for repair compared to those in English (Fox et al. 1996, 203).

More recently, building on CA and anthropological linguistics, the Pragmatic Typology approach developed a focus on “the typology of systems of language use and the principles that shape them” (Dingemanse, Blythe, and Dirksmeyer 2018, 322). Studies in Pragmatic Typology seek to identify the use of different linguistic formats in different languages: they aim at explaining commonalities in terms of universal pragmatic concerns and constraints, whereas differences are accounted for through linguistic and cultural specificities associated with individual languages. Studies include typologically different and geographically remote language communities, and they aim for a variable-based comparison of conversational practices involving formal coding procedures (e.g., concerning gaze behavior, Rossano, Brown, and Levinson 2009; turn-taking, Stivers et al. 2009; question-answer systems, Enfield, Stivers, and Levinson 2010; other-initiated repair, Dingemanse, Torreira, and Enfield 2013; Dingemanse et al. 2015; answers to polar questions, Enfield et al. 2018; recruitments, Floyd, Rossi, and Enfield 2020). This approach requires researchers to use interactional data which conform to uniform sampling criteria, using only instances of “maximally informal social interaction in familiar settings between people who knew each other well” (Enfield et al. 2010, 2617). Projects of this kind use CA for the inductive development of coding categories and add linguistic (morphological) description. Results rest both on qualitative analysis and statistical evidence.

In sum, since the early 2000s, there has been a growing body of work that has studied how basic interactional concerns and structures are managed and implemented in different languages and cultures. Concerning their methodological approach, we can distinguish several types of studies:

- a. Studies that test if and how interactional structures and practices that have been identified with respect to (American) English data in seminal studies are implemented in other languages and cultures (e.g., Moerman 1977, 1988).
- b. Edited volumes or issues of journals that collect a number of independent studies dealing with the realization of comparable interactional structures (Steensig and Drew 2008 on questions; Enfield and Stivers 2007 on person reference; Margutti et al. 2018 on invitations) and linguistic formats (Heinemann and Koivisto 2016b on change-of-state tokens; Auer and Maschler 2016 on *nu* in different Germanic languages; Sorjonen, Raevaara, and Couper-Kuhlen 2017 on imperatives). In these collective books, each study uses its own specific set of data, and has particular research questions and specific analytic angles; comparisons between the individual studies, and discussions about commonalities and differences in terms of their results, are elaborated by the editors of the volumes.

- c. Jointly designed projects with a common research focus, e.g., on self-repair (Fox et al. 1996, 2009), repair initiation with *huh* (Dingemanse et al. 2013), and second assessments (Sidnell and Enfield 2012). These projects have taken a qualitative approach with the aim of comparing how linguistic resources in different languages are used to deal with the same interactional concerns.

As shown by these examples, comparative studies in CA deal with very different objects: some studies start from a linguistic form (like change-of-state tokens, a specific particle, or the repair-initiator *huh*), whereas others start from an interactional practice within a specific sequential environment (like different types of repair, responses to polar questions, etc.). Moreover, some studies try to restrict and control the data set used (like informal conversations), although strictly speaking corpora set up specifically for comparative analyses are still very rare, and references to “informal conversations” remain abstract and cover a variety of activities, participation frameworks, and contexts. Other studies do not constrain the data examined but rather the sequential environments and types of actions. Finally, most studies proceed on the basis of an analysis of “collections” in Schegloff’s (2009) sense. Some have introduced coding systems as a basis to secure comparability and statistically valid results, although this remains controversial from an *emic* perspective.

3. The conversation analytic methodology used in this book on OKAY

CA is an approach to the study of social interaction with a distinct focus on situated action, and it has developed a distinctive research methodology to analyze situated action (see overviews in ten Have 1998; Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998; Deppermann 2001; Sidnell 2013).

The main interest of CA is to identify practices that members use to perform social actions through which knowledge is conveyed and negotiated and through which interaction is organized and relationships are managed. “A ‘practice’ is any feature of the design of a turn in a sequence that (i) has a distinctive character, (ii) has specific locations within a turn or sequence, and (iii) is distinctive in its consequences for the nature or the meaning of the action that the turn implements” (Heritage 2010, 214; Selting 2016).

We will exemplify the notion of practice with respect to the particle OH in English, which has been studied in depth by John Heritage (1984a, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2018a) and which is quite similar to OKAY in many ways. A practice is an observable, routine way of dealing with a certain pragmatic concern (e.g., claiming understanding). Practices are implemented by using linguistic formats (e.g., OH, with different prosodic contours, Local 1996; Barth-Weingarten, Couper-Kuhlen, and Deppermann 2020) and various other co-occurring resources, such as gaze

(e.g., at prior speaker), gesture (e.g., upward nod), body posture, facial expression (e.g., eyebrow raise), and object manipulation, whose temporally organized configuration can constitute complex multimodal gestalts (Mondada 2014a). Practices are tied to a certain sequential context (e.g., elicited or volunteered informing, other-repair) and are used to perform certain actions in that context (e.g., claiming a change of the speaker's epistemic state). Practices are generic structures that have context-free properties, which hold across the different local occasions at which they are deployed. At the same time, they are irremediably indexical and flexible, which means that they are always implemented with respect to the particulars of their specific, "unique" local context (Schegloff 2009).

Building on these general, formal properties of practices, and using them as methodological guidelines, the methodology of CA allows us to identify new practices inductively. It is designed to be a methodology of discovery. The starting point for the identification and analysis of a practice can be a certain form (e.g., a token like OKAY), a certain sequential environment (e.g., how to respond to an informing), or a certain interactional concern (e.g., claiming a revised understanding). However, it is important to note that the sheer identification of instances, e.g., all instances of OKAY that can be found by searching a corpus, does not yet represent a "collection" of instances of a practice in a given sequential environment, but only a list of candidate items. Rather, a collection (in the technical sense of Schegloff 2009) is based on an analysis of all candidate items for the specific actions they do in specific sequential environments. A "collection" is the result of both an in-depth sequential and linguistic analysis of each candidate instance of the practice, and a comparison of instances, identifying a common formal, sequential, and action pattern (Deppermann 2001, Chapter 6.2; Mondada 2005).

Comparing can be seen as a fundamental operation within all conversation analytic studies (Schegloff 2009; Arminen 2010): in order for a researcher to build a collection, and to decide whether an instance belongs to it, a comparative analysis between tokens, their sequential environments, and the action(s) they achieve has to be made. Moreover, comparisons have characterized CA from its early stages, not between languages and cultures, but between contexts. For instance, a fundamental comparison between the large, rather unrestricted, options available in informal conversation and the constrained and specialized options characterizing institutional settings has prompted a reflection on the theoretical importance of "conversation" as distinct from other forms of "talk-in-interaction," namely in institutional settings (Drew and Heritage 1992; Drew 2003). Specificities of the organization of turn-taking and the organization of sequences have also been identified by distinguishing telephone (and other technologically mediated) vs. face-to-face interactions, dyadic vs. multi-party interactions (and other types of participation frameworks), as well as different contexts of activity for the same

action (e.g., giving advice, delivering bad news, asking questions, requesting). Moreover, comparisons between the same type of action at different moments in history (Clayman et al. 2006) and along longitudinal processes (Pekarek Doehler, Wagner, and Gonzalez-Martinez 2018) have been proposed.

The study of OKAY across 13 languages (Danish, English, German, Swedish, Estonian, Finnish, Polish, French, Italian, Brazilian Portuguese, Mandarin, Japanese, and Korean) enables both an exemplary implementation of CA analysis and some distinct challenges. Although referred to here with the generic form OKAY (in capitals), the particle is realized in many different ways (e.g., *okei*, *occhei*, *oké*, *okra*) in specific languages. Whereas most often these forms still show phonetic similarities with English *okay*, they cannot be automatically treated as identical. This shows the importance of detailed transcripts of the forms studied. Furthermore, OKAY is used in highly diverse contexts, and this creates the need to specify in detail the sequential environments and actions concerned.

The following properties of occurrences of OKAY have been attended to in the analyses gathered in this volume:

- *type of interaction, activity, and participation framework*: the social setting and type of interaction, the participation framework including the number of parties and participants to an encounter, their situated roles (including official status, epistemic and deontic rights, being acquainted vs. unacquainted);
- *sequential environment*: the position of OKAY within interactional sequences, e.g., in responses to stories, informings, and repairs (Chapter 3, 7, 12), closings of sequences and encounters, and transitions between activities (Chapter 4, 8, 9, 10);
- *actions* performed (or co-constituted) by OKAY;
- *position within a turn*: stand-alone uses of OKAY, constituting the whole turn; OKAY as a TCU of its own within a larger turn; OKAY in TCU- and turn-initial, turn-medial, and turn-final positions (see Chapter 5, 9);
- *phonetic and prosodic realization of OKAY*, including the following aspects: realization as monophthong vs. diphthong, morphophonetic variation (like *mkay*, *kay*, *okidoki*); stress, contour, loudness, onset and pitch register, creak, syllable duration, aspiration/inserted laugh particles; in addition to auditory analysis, instrumental analyses using PRAAT were performed for some studies (e.g., Chapter 5, 6);
- *part of speech*: OKAY as a particle vs. as noun, adverb, or adjective. For this book, only particle uses have been studied in detail (see below);
- *co-occurrence with other particles* (like *ah okay*, *well okay*) and reduplication (*okay okay*, see Chapter 8);

- *multimodal realization*: OKAY as integrated in a multimodal gestalt, together with various bodily resources, like gaze and nodding (see Chapter 12), as well as body movements, postural changes, and object manipulations (see Chapter 10, 11).

As a consequence of the emphasis of CA on the situated details in which actions, turns, or forms are produced, and as a consequence of the challenges of OKAY across very different languages, transcription is a fundamental methodological practice. It lies at the core of not only the preparation of the data, but also the analysis itself. This book adopts the conventions of Jefferson (2004) for transcribing talk, elements of the GAT 2 transcription system for prosody (Selting et al. 2011), the Leipzig glossing system (Lehmann 1982; Croft 2003), and the conventions of Mondada (2018a) for transcribing embodied conduct.

The Jeffersonian conventions (Jefferson 2004) insist on the temporality of talk in its diverse manifestations (Hepburn and Bolden 2017). This enables us to capture the fundamental organizational aspects of turn-taking (gaps and overlaps) and of the formatting of actions within sequences and wider sequential environments, revealing how they relate to each other.

Not only temporal but other detailed formatting elements of the production of tokens are considered in these conventions, such as intonation patterns. In the transcripts of this volume, these prosodic notations have been expanded by taking into consideration the GAT 2 system (Selting et al. 2011) when suitable for the language transcribed. This enables us to specify the intonational contours of OKAY, which might be fundamental for the identification and differentiation of the actions accomplished by the particle.

Moreover, since the project involves 13 different languages, glosses and translations of the original data constitute an essential part of the transcripts. This is essential for readability but also has immediate analytical consequences. Using glossing categories for different languages is a practical necessity and at the same time presupposes a problematic assumption, as discussed by Haspelmath (2010), who points at the tendency of cross-linguistic glossing categories towards “categorical universalism.” In the transcripts, the glosses are a pragmatic instrument for making data in their original language understandable (rather than an analytical basis for comparison). In this sense, the original, the glosses, and the translation in English *together* build the intelligibility of the data. They are meant to support the reading of the original transcript, and not to autonomize the reading of the translation. In this sense, the translation provided is not an equivalent of the original, but rather a further gloss that helps readers understand the original. This is why in many cases the translation is quite close to the original, providing for a rather literal version of it, instead of seeking an idiomatic rendering of the original. Moreover, in

order not to impose any translation or equivalent on the specific forms of OKAY in different languages, the particle has been glossed but not translated.

An important contribution of the volume is the fact that the comparative analysis includes elements not only of the talk but also of the embodied conduct of the participants, when face-to-face situations are involved. This invites a multimodal comparative analysis that considers talk and the body together. The conventions adopted here are those of Mondada (2018a), which focus on the specific temporality of multiple embodied conducts, ordered both sequentially and simultaneously. This mode of transcription can provide hints about OKAY as belonging to possible multimodal gestalts (Mondada 2014a), that is, configurations in which embodied resources such as gesture, head movements, body postures, body movements, etc. are integral parts of the intelligibility of OKAY, in the same way as other specific phonetic, prosodic, and turn-constructural features.

Considering these aspects together opens up new perspectives for the ways in which comparative analysis in a sequential-interactional perspective can be done and enriched – never considering a formal token alone, but instead its sequentially meaningful combination with other multimodal properties. This shows both the locally specific situatedness of the uses and the conditions of their cross-contextual comparability.

4. Data used in the present studies of OKAY

This book gathers CA studies of OKAY in 13 languages. Following the CA analytic mentality and procedures, all languages have been documented using naturalistic data, audio/video-recorded in their social context, without any other intervention of the researchers. Two kinds of studies have been generated on this basis.

First and foremost, transversal studies (Chapter 3, 4) using data from all the corpora, illustrate the sequential environments in which OKAY can feature in systematic ways throughout the languages studied. Claiming understanding (Chapter 3) and managing closings and transitions (Chapter 4) have been identified as recurring functions in which OKAY is pervasively used in all languages studied. In these chapters, a diverse range of contexts is illustrated, both ordinary and institutional, including phone and face-to-face encounters. Whereas the type of data – the social contexts in which they have been recorded – has not been constrained, the sequential environments in which OKAY features have been rigorously controlled in the analyses. This approach enables us to demonstrate the variety of uses of OKAY as well as the methodic ways in which it is used in precisely defined sequential environments across the languages.

Second, in-depth studies (Chapter 5–12) have focused on specific languages (American English, Chapter 5; Danish, Chapter 6; Finnish, Chapter 7; Korean and Japanese, Chapter 8; Brazilian Portuguese, Chapter 9; French and Italian, Chapter 10; Estonian and Polish, Chapter 11; German, Chapter 12) and on specific formal aspects (such as prosody, Chapter 5, 6; repetitions, Chapter 8; multimodality, Chapter 10, 12) or specific sequential phenomena (such as responses to informings, Chapter 7; alignment in responses, Chapter 9; action transition, Chapter 10; directive sequences, Chapter 11; displays of understanding, Chapter 12). Some chapters focus on a certain activity type, others use data from a wider range of contexts.

Table 1 at the end of the chapter presents an overview of the corpora used in the book, both in the initial cross-linguistic chapters and in the following in-depth analyses. It shows the diversity of the corpora as well as recurrent settings across the languages (such as telephone calls, informal conversations, and institutional encounters). Although the number of occurrences of OKAY indicated in Table 1 does not differentiate between specific uses, and must therefore be read with caution, the numbers show the variability of OKAY not only across languages (in some languages only a limited number of occurrences have been found, in striking contrast to other languages) but also across different and similar settings (e.g., a phone conversation in a language can contain an abundant number of OKAYs, whereas another phone call in the same language can exhibit only few occurrences). These indicative numbers not only suggest that OKAY is not used in the same range and frequency across languages, but also that its use is sensitive to variations in types of activities, as well as types of speakers (as far as age, social class, and education are concerned – although these variables have not been collected in the meta-data of most corpora and are not used in CA analyses).

The way this book has been conceived is both as a collective project on OKAY in social interaction and as a collection of specific studies on OKAY in interactions in different languages and socio-cultural contexts.

In a first step, a survey was made by all authors about the occurrences of OKAY found in corpora representing a diversity of languages. Each language team prepared an overview of OKAY in their data and sampled recurrent uses. These first analyses gave an overview of the diversity of sequential environments in which OKAY is used in different languages. At two meetings in Mannheim and Helsinki in 2017, prototypical examples for each language were presented and analyzed by all contributors. In order to enhance the comparability of analyses and findings, it was decided to focus on OKAYs that are used as particles, and on the interactional work they achieve (for turn-taking, sequence and topic organization, managing understanding, closing, etc.). The resulting focus is thus on stand-alone OKAYs that constitute a whole turn and on OKAYs that occur as a prosodic, mostly initial, unit

of their own, within a longer turn. Additionally, two chapters include a discussion of OKAYs used as tags in turn-final position (Chapter 5, 9). Syntactically integrated uses as predicative adjective (“that’s okay with me.”), adverb (“it looks okay.”), or noun (“they gave their okay.”) have not been considered.

On this basis, each language team contributed extracts for the two most pervasive sets of uses, receipts and claims of understanding (Chapter 3) and closings and transitions (Chapter 4), which were identified as recurrent sequential contexts across languages. After convening on shared transcription conventions (especially for orthographic and prosodic representations of the OKAY tokens), terminology, and analytic foci, researchers for each language also developed collections (Chapter 5–12) concerning at least one language and a specific use of OKAY.

5. Some challenges and limitations

In this book, we present studies that cover a maximally wide range of the uses of OKAY in different languages in all sorts of naturally occurring interactions. We have aimed at an exploration of the phenomenological richness of the uses of OKAY across languages, covering a wide range of cultural contexts, interaction types, and participation frameworks. This approach has been preferred over an attempt to pin down differences across languages, as is often the case with comparative projects. Our choice has been informed both by methodological and empirical reasons. A comparison of instances of OKAY whose results would unequivocally speak for differences between languages and cultures would require that all other interactional dimensions that could account for differences in the use of OKAY were kept constant. In other words, we would need to have corpora of data that were uniform in terms of the distribution of interaction types, participation frameworks, and sequential environments, within comparable contexts and activities. Such uniformity can only be achieved if a highly restrictive sampling procedure is used. On the one hand, this would require collecting new data for most of the languages to be studied. On the other hand, this would necessarily rule out much variation of interactional practices in the languages studied. Most importantly, institutional interaction could be covered only to a very small degree, and would run the risk of adopting a very general (not at all *emic*) typification of institutional contexts (this critical argument applies to “informal conversation,” too, a description often adopted for comparative samples as implying an homogeneous set of data, yet actually referring to a diversity of contexts, activities, number of participants, and participation frameworks). As this book shows, OKAY is routinely used in many institutional contexts, in which it accomplishes specific interactional work, which depends on

the specificity of the activity, the institutionality, and the material ecology of these contexts. Furthermore, a control of the types of contexts documented in the data across languages would run the risk that only a restricted set of languages and cultures would conform to them, or that only some activities in particular languages or cultures would be considered – probably the more standardized and attuned to a global socio-economy – with the loss of many other more specific contexts. This could lead to data that are rather artificial, marginal, and not representative of the discursive practices in a given language. Thus, while comparability of data could be maximized and controlled, the ways in which the data could be said to cover the varieties of naturally occurring interaction in the individual languages and cultures would be severely restricted, with the effect that only small segments of interactive practices in an individual language would be studied.

In order to cover phenomenological variation most comprehensively, the contributors to this book have drawn from a rich variety of corpora that exist for the languages under study. Yet since these corpora are of different sizes and comprise different types of interactions, activities, and participations frameworks, a direct comparison concerning differences in the distribution of forms and uses in the different languages is not possible. The finding that a certain use does not occur in the corpora available for one language could suggest that this use is indeed rare in that language. However, it does not provide robust negative evidence: we cannot infer that a use does not exist in a language just because it does not occur in the corpora available for that language. The same applies for relative differences in distribution. Because of the incommensurability of the composition of corpora, but also because we do not know how interaction types, sequence types, and other pragmatic factors are distributed in social interaction within the individual languages and cultures, any differences that we could find in the use of OKAY would be very hard to assess. The heterogeneity of the available corpora thus limits their comparability (cf. Couper-Kuhlen 2019b). For future research that aims for comparison across languages and cultures, there is a need for large, diversified, and open-access corpora of naturally occurring multimodal interaction. Such corpora are currently only available for a small number of languages, notably Danish (Corpus Samtalebank, <https://samtalebank.talkbank.org>), French (Corpus CLAPI, <http://clapi.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr/>), and German (corpus FOLK, https://dgd.ids-mannheim.de/dgd/pragdb.dgd_extern.welcome).

The use of a wide variety of audio- and video-recordings from different languages has led to a robust description of the spectrum of current uses of OKAY in this book. In our analyses, we have found that the core interactional jobs done by OKAY and the range of its uses are strikingly similar across languages. This is represented in Chapters 3 and 4, in which we describe the most pervasive uses

of OKAY, which are recurrent in the languages considered. Thus, our inductive approach, which involves a methodology that strongly emphasizes and allows for the representation of contextual and linguistic particularities of the use of OKAY in the individual languages, has yielded the conclusion that there is a large area of commonality between the different languages concerning the use of OKAY. This is not to be understood as a claim to universalism – the number of languages is much too small for such a claim. However, it shows that the appropriation of OKAY in very different languages and contexts has led to a range of largely similar practices to an astonishingly high degree.

Our findings highlight the importance of a holistic analysis of OKAY turns that includes prosody and the larger sequential and multimodal context (see Chapters 5–12). This has allowed us to delimit individual uses of OKAY in a more systematic way than has been done before, showing how the realization of OKAY and its context are constitutive for different uses. The inductive approach has also made it possible to identify uses that were not documented previously, for example the use of OKAY as a continuer or for “qualified acceptance.” Another area in which new observations have begun to emerge concerns the relationship of OKAY to other particles in a given language (see Chapters 1, 7). OKAY coexists with other particles that do very similar or even equivalent interactional work in the specific languages. The way OKAY progressively integrates into the system of particles of each language, and eventually changes their distribution over history, is a topic that could be fruitfully expanded by future research. This would require systematic knowledge of the system of response particles in every language – something that does not exist for most of the languages studied in this book. Another related line of future investigation, which is not addressed in this volume, concerns the diachronic development of different uses of OKAY and their spread in different languages. Chapter 5 suggests avenues for doing this for English, and it would be exciting to see such work pursued for OKAY in other languages as well (see also Chapters 1, 7).

Table 1. Inventory of the corpora used in this book and their characteristics

Name of the corpus	Language	Place of the recording	Date of the recording	Type of interaction	Type of recording: Audio or video	Length of the recording that has been transcribed	Number of OKAYs in that transcribed recording	Reference to the examples in the book (chapter/ excerpt number)
NB 028	American English	California, USA	1960s	Informal telephone conversation	Audio	44 min 31 s	8	Chapter 4/ Excerpt 6
Joyce & Stan	American English	California, USA	1960s	Informal telephone conversation	Audio	8 min 28 s	11	Chapter 5/ Excerpt 4, 13
HGII	American English	USA	1960s	Informal telephone conversation	Audio	20 min	17	Chapter 5/ Excerpt 1, 5, 12, 17
Call Home 4544	American English	USA	1994–1997	Informal telephone conversation	Audio	25 min 34 s	1	Chapter 5/ Excerpt 9
Call Friend 4984	American English	USA	1996–1997	Informal telephone conversation	Audio	30 min	26	Chapter 5/ Excerpt 3, 6
Call Friend 6239	American English	USA	1996–1997	Informal telephone conversation	Audio	30 min	9	Chapter 3/ Excerpt 11 Chapter 5/ Excerpt 8
Call Friend 6899	American English	USA	1996–1997	Informal telephone conversation	Audio	30 min	25	Chapter 5/ Excerpt 10

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Name of the corpus	Language	Place of the recording	Date of the recording	Type of interaction	Type of recording: Audio or video	Length of the recording that has been transcribed	Number of OKAYs in that transcribed recording	Reference to the examples in the book (chapter/excerpt number)
Kamunsky 3	American English	USA	1960s	Informal telephone conversation	Audio	13 min 27 s	42	Chapter 4/ Excerpt 4 Chapter 5/ Excerpt 11 Chapter 5/ Excerpt 14
Two girls	American English	USA	1960s	Informal telephone conversation	Audio	16 min 25 s	5	Chapter 5/ Excerpt 14
Debbie & Shelley	American English	USA	1960s	Informal telephone conversation	Audio	7 min 37 s	8	Chapter 5/ Excerpt 15, 16
Farmhouse	American English	Colorado, USA	1998	Informal face-to-face conversation	Video	38 min 36 s	20	Chapter 5/ Excerpt 2, 7, 18
Samtalebank	Danish	Denmark	2009	Private phone call	Audio	6 min 48 s	1	Chapter 3/ Excerpt 16
HB	Danish	Denmark	2015	Dietician-client interaction	Video	6 min	6	Chapter 4/ Excerpt 11
ADK	Danish	Denmark	2002	Private phone call	Audio	unknown	unknown	Chapter 6/ Excerpt 1, 2
ADK	Danish	Denmark	2002	Private phone call	Audio	unknown	unknown	Chapter 6/ Excerpt 2
AULing	Danish	Denmark	2003	Everyday conversation	Video	23 min	10	Chapter 6/ Excerpt 3
Samtalebank	Danish	Denmark	2009	Everyday conversation	Video	44 min	21	Chapter 6/ Excerpt 4

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Name of the corpus	Language	Place of the recording	Date of the recording	Type of interaction	Type of recording: Audio or video	Length of the recording that has been transcribed	Number of OKAYs in that transcribed recording	Reference to the examples in the book (chapter/excerpt number)
Samtalebank	Danish	Denmark	2009	Everyday conversation	Video	50 min	9	Chapter 6/ Excerpt 5
AULing	Danish	Denmark	1990s	Private phone call	Audio	7 min 22 s	2	Chapter 6/ Excerpt 6
Samtalebank	Danish	Denmark	2009	Private phone call	Audio	6 min 44 s	1	Chapter 6/ Excerpt 7
Samtalebank	Danish	Denmark	2009	Everyday conversation	Video	43 min	10	Chapter 6/ Excerpt 8
Samtalebank	Danish	Denmark	2009	Everyday conversation	Video	30 min 35 s	12	Chapter 6/ Excerpt 9
AULing	Danish	Denmark	2015	Everyday conversation	Video	unknown	unknown	Chapter 6/ Excerpt 10
AULing	Danish	Denmark	2008	Shop encounter	Video	2 min 15 s	1	Chapter 6/ Excerpt 11
KTA	Finnish	Helsinki, Finland	1988–1989	Everyday telephone conversation	Audio	1 h 30 min	25	–
KTA2	Finnish	Western Finland	1997	Everyday telephone conversation	Audio	1 h 55 min	47	Chapter 7/ Excerpt 1
KTA3	Finnish	Helsinki, Finland	2007–2008	Everyday telephone conversation	Audio	1 h 49 min	73	Chapter 7/ Excerpt 2, 4, 6, 10, 11, 15 Chapter 4/ Excerpt 23

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Name of the corpus	Language	Place of the recording	Date of the recording	Type of interaction	Type of recording: Audio or video	Length of the recording that has been transcribed	Number of OKAYs in that transcribed recording	Reference to the examples in the book (chapter/excerpt number)
Repair	Finnish	Helsinki, Finland	Mar 2011	Everyday telephone conversation	Video	1 h 10 min	99	Chapter 7/ Excerpt 3 Chapter 7/ Excerpt 14 Chapter 3/ Excerpt 3 Chapter 7/ Excerpt 5, 13 Chapter 7/ Excerpt 12 Chapter 3/ Excerpt 4 Chapter 8/ Excerpt 9, 10
Pekkanen	Finnish	Helsinki, Finland	2015	Student union	Video	6 h 45 min	114	
Radio	Finnish	Helsinki, Finland	2017	Radio interview	Audio	13 min	3	
Call Home Corpus	Japanese	USA; Japan	1996	Telephone conversation	Audio	3 h	2	
Corpus of Everyday Japanese Conversation	Japanese	Tokyo, Japan	2017	Ordinary conversation; Various institutional settings	Video	50 h	6	
Architect office	Japanese	Tokyo, Japan	Sep 2006	Meeting	Video	1 h	2	Chapter 8/ Excerpt 8
Sushi bar encounters	Japanese	Osaka, Japan	Sep 2005	Restaurant encounter	Video	7 h	2	Chapter 4/ Excerpt 8 Chapter 8/ Excerpt 2 Chapter 8/ Excerpt 5
Guitar lesson	Japanese	Tokyo, Japan	Jan 2018	Guitar tutoring	Video	2 h	21	

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Name of the corpus	Language	Place of the recording	Date of the recording	Type of interaction	Type of recording: Audio or video	Length of the recording that has been transcribed	Number of OKAYs in that transcribed recording	Reference to the examples in the book (chapter/excerpt number)
MC3	Japanese	Tokyo, Japan	May 2016	Telephone conversation	Audio	25 min	1	Chapter 8/ Excerpt 11
Linguistic Data Consortium CallFriend Korean	Korean	USA; Canada	1996	Ordinary telephone conversation	Audio	50 h	19	Chapter 8/ Excerpt 3, 7
KGSA	Korean	USA	Apr 2005, Aug 2006	Student group meeting	Video	4 h	4	Chapter 8/ Excerpt 1, 4
Korean Telephone Calls	Korean	USA; Korea	Jan 2003– Dec 2004	Ordinary telephone conversation	Audio	5h	9	Chapter 8/ Excerpt 6
ER	Korean	Korea	Oct 2011	Medical encounter	Video	17 h	1	Chapter 4/ Excerpt 9
ECOCLIN	Brazilian Portuguese	City in Southern Brazil	Jan 2013	Ultrasound exams (doctor-patient)	Audio	11 min 43 s	2	Chapter 3/ Excerpt 5
HMF ACONGEN	Brazilian Portuguese	City in Southern Brazil	Feb 2014	Genetic counseling (doctor-patient)	Audio	27 h 5 min	53	Chapter 4/ Excerpt 14
LAVA JATO	Brazilian Portuguese	Brasilia, Brazil	Mar 2016	Tapped telephone interactions among politicians	Audio	1 h 53 min	12	Chapter 4/ Excerpt 20

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Name of the corpus	Language	Place of the recording	Date of the recording	Type of interaction	Type of recording: Audio or video	Length of the recording that has been transcribed	Number of OKAYs in that transcribed recording	Reference to the examples in the book (chapter/excerpt number)
DJSK	Brazilian Portuguese	Brasília, Brazil	Jan 2007–Dec 2009	Health helpline telephone interactions	Audio	41 h 30 min	688	Chapter 9/ Excerpt 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13
CALL_Jean2	French	Lyon, France	2003	Calls for help to service providers	Audio	10 min	12	Chapter 3/ Excerpt 14
FRO_Par1007	French	Paris, France	2016	Cheese shop encounter, 1–3 customers with 1 salesperson (27 encounters, 3 salespersons)	Video	2 h 50 min	68	Chapter 4/ Excerpt 3, 15
AGRO_Inra	French	Nancy, France	2001	Work meeting between 2 agronomists and 1 computer scientist	Video	37 min	13	Chapter 10/ Excerpt 3, 4
CAB4	French	Lyon, France	2008	Grassroots political meetings, ca. 100 part.	Video	24 min	6	Chapter 10/ Excerpt 8
CAB7	French	Lyon, France	2008	Grassroots political meetings, ca. 100 part.	Video	2h	85	Chapter 10/ Excerpt 1

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Name of the corpus	Language	Place of the recording	Date of the recording	Type of interaction	Type of recording: Audio or video	Length of the recording that has been transcribed	Number of OKAYs in that transcribed recording	Reference to the book (chapter/excerpt number)
CAB12	French	Lyon, France	2008	Grassroots political meetings, ca. 100 part.	Video	1 h 45 min	19	Chapter 10/ Excerpt 7
Business meeting	Italian	Milan, Italy	2013	Business meeting, 5 part.	Video	4 h 20 min	more than 50	Chapter 10/ Excerpt 2, 5, 6
Guided Tour Adults	Italian	Naples, Italy	Feb 2009	Guided tour, 8 participants	Video	3 h 20 min	14	Chapter 10/ Excerpt 10
Guided Tour School	Italian	Naples, Italy	Feb 2009	Guided tour, 24 participants	Video	2 h 30 min	unknown	Chapter 10/ Excerpt 9
Cold calls	Italian	Caller: Olten, Switzerland; Called: Whole Switzerland	2011	Outbound call from bank employee to existing clients	Audio	37 min 20 s	24	Chapter 3/ Excerpt 10
Driving Lessons	Italian	Ticino, Switzerland	2009–2010	Driving lesson 7 lessons, 2 in-car participants (2 instructors, 7 trainees)	Video	7 h	882	Chapter 4/ Excerpt 10
Grocery shopping	Italian	Ticino, Switzerland	2004	Grocery shopping, 2 customers	Video	1 h	16	Chapter 4/ Excerpt 16
Merlin	Estonian	Tallinn, Estonia	1998–1999	Phone call	Audio	30 s (all calls 2 h 10 min 50 s)	1 (53)	Chapter 3/ Excerpt 6

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Name of the corpus	Language	Place of the recording	Date of the recording	Type of interaction	Type of recording: Audio or video	Length of the recording that has been transcribed	Number of OKAYs in that transcribed recording	Reference to the examples in the book (chapter/excerpt number)
Sõnnik	Estonian	Läänemaa, Estonia	2014	Physical labor	Video	6 min transcr. (5 h 30 min recorded)	3 (ca. 20)	Chapter 11/ Excerpt 3, 5
Kelder	Estonian	Tallinn, Estonia	1998–1999	Phone call	Audio	5 min (all calls 2 h 15 min 22 s)	4 (25)	Chapter 4/ Excerpt 2 Chapter 11/ Excerpt 1
Pille	Estonian	Tallinn, Estonia	1998–1999	Informal phone call	Audio	3 min (all calls 3 h 13 min 23 s)	4 (112)	Chapter 4/ Excerpt 22
Gądki	Polish	Gądki, Poland	2009	Phone call	Audio	9 min 28 s	9	Chapter 3/ Excerpt 9
Gądki	Polish	Gądki, Poland	2009	Phone call	Audio	2 min 30 s	6	Chapter 3/ Excerpt 15
Gądki	Polish	Gądki, Poland	2009	Phone call	Audio	4 min 6 s	3	Chapter 11/ Excerpt 2
Gądki	Polish	Gądki, Poland	2009	Phone call	Audio	1 min 15 s	1	Chapter 4/ Excerpt 21
Komorze	Polish	Komorze, Poland	2011	Professional talk	Video	7 h rec.	unknown	Chapter 11/ Excerpt 4
Komorze	Polish	Komorze, Poland	2011	Professional talk	Video	4 h 30 min rec.	unknown	Chapter 11/ Excerpt 6 (6–6.4)
I. Studio	Polish	Poznań, Poland	2016	Talk at work	Video	3 min transcr. (35 min rec.)	2	Chapter 4/ Excerpt 18

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Name of the corpus	Language	Place of the recording	Date of the recording	Type of interaction	Type of recording: Audio or video	Length of the recording that has been transcribed	Number of OKAYs in that transcribed recording	Reference to the examples in the book (chapter/excerpt number)
FOLK sub-corpus (specific videos + telephone)	German	German-speaking countries	2008–2014	Informal conversation and institutional interaction, 2–6 part.	Audio and video	26 h 7 min	697	Chapter 3/ Excerpt 13, 17 Chapter 4/ Excerpt 13
Betz's corpus	German	Different regions in Germany, incl. transatlantic calls from USA to Germany	2004–2016	Informal conversation (e.g. game playing, meals), 2–5 part.	Audio and video	4 h 35 min	97	Chapter 3/ Excerpt 1
PECII	German	Palatine region, Germany	2016	Driving	Video	1 min 27 s	1	Chapter 4/ Excerpt 19
Mandarin Multimodal Corpus	Mandarin Chinese	Beijing, China; Shanghai, China; Edmonton, Canada	May 2008– Oct 2016	Tea/coffee conversation, dinner-table conversation, playing card games	Audio and video	19 h	57	Chapter 3/ Excerpt 2, 8; Chapter 4/ Excerpt 17
Bertilsson ARUU	Swedish	Sweden	2016	Breast feeding support help line, 2 part.	Audio	22 min 24 s (1 call)	unknown	Chapter 3/ Excerpt 12
JohanssonSyUU	Swedish	Sweden	2015	Handicraft circle, ca. 8 part.	Video	3 h 10 min	unknown	Chapter 4/ Excerpt 12