Chapter 12

Coordination of OKAY, nods, and gaze in claiming understanding and closing topics

Henrike Helmer¹, Emma Betz² and Arnulf Deppermann¹
¹Leibniz-Institut für Deutsche Sprache, Mannheim / ²University of Waterloo

Our paper examines how bodily behavior contributes to the local meaning of OKAY. We explore the interplay between OKAY as response to informings and narratives and accompanying multimodal resources in German multi-party interaction. Based on informal and institutional conversations, we describe three different uses of OKAY with falling intonation and the recurrent multimodal patterns that are associated with them and that can be characterized as ‘multimodal gestalts’. We show that: (1) OKAY as a claim to sufficient understanding is typically accompanied by upward nodding; (2) OKAY after change-of-state tokens exhibits a recurrent pattern of up- and downward nodding with distinctive timing; and (3) OKAY closing larger activities is associated with gaze-aversion from the prior speaker.

Keywords: nodding, gaze, multimodal, bodily conduct, object manipulation, understanding, closing, transition, change-of-state token, German

1. Introduction

Existing work on OKAY highlights its uses in transitions and closings and has proposed that OKAY foregrounds the prior action or action implications rather than the prior turn’s information content: In response to directives, OKAY conveys or projects compliance (see Merritt 1980; Keevallik and Weidner, this volume); in invitation, offer, and request sequences, third-position OKAY proposes sequence closure by accepting a second-pair part (Beach 1993; Schegloff 2007, 120–123; Seuren 2018, 34). It has also been suggested, however, that speakers can use OKAY to manage states of information and understanding (Heritage 1984a, 2018b; Schegloff 2007, 37). The cross-linguistic data support this (see Koivisto and Sorjonen, this volume). The present paper aims to show how OKAY along with
multimodal resources is used in response to informings and tellings to claim understanding and propose topic closure in German. We present and discuss evidence for two recurrent ‘multimodal gestalts’ (Mondada 2014a, 2016).

Our focus is on responses to turns designed as informings, where OKAY appears as response in different sequential positions (second, third, or as a response to part of a telling). More specifically, this paper explores the interplay between bodily conduct, prosody, and local action construction in German talk-in-interaction. Our analysis traces different actions that OKAY with falling intonation can implement in response to informings and narratives (e.g., reports, advice-giving). Excerpt 1, in which Sara’s receipt a prompted self-identification by Anna, shows a typical example of OKAY in response to an informing:

**Excerpt 1.** *die anna* ‘anna’ (FOLK_E_00251_SE_01_T_01_DF_01_T_01_00–00–42_00–01–12_c72-c73), 2012, German, face-to-face, roommate interview

01 SAR: du bist jetzt die?

now you are the

02 ANN: anna.

03 SAR: °okee °

We will be showing three different uses of OKAY with falling intonation, each characterized by a specific pattern of gaze and nodding. Data come from informal conversations among friends and family members, informal rather than institutional interviews of prospective roommates in a shared flat (as in Excerpt 1), and from institutional conversations like counseling and university graduate advisory staff meetings.

1.1 Research on OKAY

Research on OKAY in German mainly focuses on institutional, task-oriented settings, such as job interviews and job interview training (Birkner 2001), workplace meetings (Meier 2002; Barske 2009), and doctor-patient interaction (Kaiser 2011). Research on informal interaction includes private, every-day phone calls (Harren and Raitaniemi 2008) and multi-party face-to-face interaction (Oloff 2019).

Kaiser (2011) shows that the meaning of OKAY in its use as an evaluating expression in acceptance or agreement (stemming from the predicative use of OKAY) is connected to and reflected in a potential closing function at different levels. OKAY may close a local sequence, larger joint projects, tasks or phases in

---

1. In the sequential contexts of our interest, we did not find OKAY with rising intonation.

2. The numbers at the end of each header (here ‘c72-c73’) refer to the first and last segment of the respective transcript as it is displayed in the database (dgd.ids-mannheim.de).
interaction. Harren and Raitaniemi (2008) illustrate how the particle is used as a pre-closing in German informal telephone calls in order to initiate and support the transition to the proper closing. In phases of transition, OKAY typically closes a phase and then is often followed by temporal adverbs like dann (‘then’) and jetzt (‘now’) that introduce a new item on the agenda (cf. Meier 2002, 118–122). Oloff (2019), who highlights the particle’s use as a ‘neutral’ acceptance token, shows that OKAY is also regularly preceded by change-of-state tokens like ah ‘oh’. In its potential bounding or closing function OKAY evaluates the previous phase, and allows participants to reorient or refocus before the speaker executes a transition to next-positioned new topics or actions (Birkner 2001; Meier 2002; Kaiser 2011).

Prior research points to the fact that the formal realization of OKAY is important for its function (Barske 2009; Kaiser 2011; Oloff 2019; also noted in Meier 2002). Kaiser (2011, 75–76) notes that prosodic aspects of OKAY may hint at impatience, surprise or acknowledgement, while Oloff (2019, 216) notes a connection between OKAYs with rising intonation and following expansions. Barske (2009) examines multimodal aspects in workplace-meetings. He points out that there is a systematic connection between eye-gaze and the function of OKAY as a closing or transition marker and as a type of continuer. He shows that speakers who deploy a free-standing OKAY for the purpose of a transition to a next topic withdraw their gaze from current co-speakers and orient toward relevant objects or other participants (ibid., 8). Recipients producing free-standing OKAY with maintained eye-gaze, instead, display information receipt and use OKAY as a continuer, allowing the current speaker to hold the floor (ibid., 19).

1.2 Research on gaze in responses

Barske’s findings are in line with other research on the coordination of gaze and responses (with or without responsive particles). Since gaze behavior serves as a display of attention and (dis)engagement (C. Goodwin 1981), recipients typically tend to look at speakers (e.g., Kendon 1967; Argyle and Cook 1976; C. Goodwin 1980, 1981; Rossano 2013). Speakers orient to the absence of listeners’ gaze (e.g., by using restarts, cf. C. Goodwin 1980). This hints at the fact that gaze is employed as one display of availability and attention in social interaction (Argyle and Cook 1976). In contrast, speakers may look away from their recipients for parts of their turns (C. Goodwin 1980). Additionally, speakers’ gaze has been shown to elicit listeners’ responses or select them as next speakers (Kendon 1967; Bavelas, Coates, and Johnson 2002). More recent research has found that gaze orientation and gaze shifts vary according to conversational activity types, social actions and sequence organization (Rossano 2012). Haddington (2006) shows that the use of gaze is
interactionally motivated and helps participants to construct, monitor and understand stances. Stivers and Rossano (2010, 24) identify gaze as one feature (besides syntax and prosody) for mobilizing response and for increasing accountability to provide a response when it was lacking.

1.3 Research on nodding in and as responses

Another multimodal feature routinely connected to responses and response particles is nodding. Sometimes nodding and shifts in gaze behavior are related and conducted simultaneously (Argyle and Cook 1976; Szatrowski 2000). Nodding is regularly employed as a “backchannel signal” (Hadar, Steiner, and Rose 1985; McClave 2000; Bavelas et al. 2002), accompanying response particles or executing response itself. Several authors identify or examine nodding as executing or accompanying confirmations (Stivers 2010), acknowledgements (Mondada 2011; Kaukomaa, Päräkylä, and Ruusuvuori 2015), responses more generally (Dittmann and Llewellyn 1968; Goodwin and Goodwin 1986), and alignment and affiliation to topic and speaker’s stance (Stivers 2008). In terms of timing, nods are found to typically precede a verbal reaction in form of an affirmation (Stivers 2010). Svinhufvud (2016) examines the nodding of recipients in coordination with taking notes. He shows that nodding is deployed as a transition marker when speakers proceed from listening to writing: Regularly, head movements are executed backward3 and as such display understanding of received information after a prior specific question. During note-taking, recipients do not look at the speaker themselves but use nodding as a visible device to display attention and understanding.

1.4 Data

Being interested in the coordination of talk, nods, gaze and other bodily behavior, we base our study on video data only. Our findings rest upon the detailed multimodal analysis of 132 instances of stand-alone OKAY with falling intonation in response to informings and tellings. All instances stem from video-recorded multi-party interaction from the publicly accessible corpus of German talk-in-interaction FOLK (dgd.ids-mannheim.de). Two interactions come from institutional interaction types (a job interview training and a team meeting at the university), three from more informal types of interaction (three friends eating dinner, participants baking and cooking together, “casting” of a new roommate for a shared apartment). We selected

3. Svinhufvud (2016) uses the expression ‘backwards’ to refer to the head movement on the upper part of the sagittal axis. In the presented paper, we use the expression ‘upward’ instead.
only multi-party, stationary settings in which all participants are seated at a table for most or all of the interaction or engage in only limited movement through space (e.g., between appliances in a kitchen) in order to guarantee the comparability of data and findings. We searched for all OKAYs as stand-alone tokens that respond to informings and that constitute their own prosodic unit in a turn. We focus on interactional uses and thus excluded predicative, attributive and adverbial OKAYs as well as OKAY as a noun. We transcribed all excerpts according to the conventions presented in the appendix in this volume.

We identified three uses of OKAY: as a claim to sufficient understanding (Section 2), as an understanding claim after a change-of-state token (Section 3) and in closing larger activities (Section 4).

2. OKAY as a claim to sufficient understanding

OKAY appears in our collection of free-standing particles with falling intonation in second or third position (n=75). Using representative examples from our collection, we show that, in response to informings, these OKAYs propose sufficient understanding on the speaker’s part. The import of such a claim differs according to the affordances of sequential position: In third-position uses, speakers treat the prior turn as adequately informative in response to a question or candidate understanding. They thereby show that no further expansion is needed and facilitate a return to pending issues or a shift to next matters. In responsive uses in larger narratives, on the other hand, OKAY receipts (a chunk of) information as particularly salient or important or claim that they have connected different pieces of information and thus reached a new level of understanding. Thus, OKAY shows how speakers understand and structure larger stretches of talk.

2.1 OKAY as understanding claim in third position

OKAY is regularly used in third position to question-answer-sequences that are concerned with informing. In this position, it proposes that the prior turn is a sufficiently informative response to a question asked or an understanding presented.4 This kind of work in third position amounts to possible sequence closure (Schegloff 2007, 115–147) and is treated that way by co-participants.

In Excerpt 2 (a longer version of Excerpt 1), taken from a prospective roommate interview among university students, the ‘candidate’ Anna has just started to

4. Cf. Heritage (1984a, 2018b), on uses of oh which treat the informative content of the answer as the primary focus of the sequence.
narrate her biography (line 1). Sara, who is seated to Anna’s left, initiates an inser-
tion sequence by asking Anna to state her name (line 3), and Anna self-identifies 
in line 4.5

Excerpt 2. die anna ‘anna’ (FOLK_E_00251_SE_V01_DF_01_T_01_00–00–42_00–
01–12_c71-c76), 2012, German, face-to-face, roommate interview6

01 ANN:  =also ich bin ah zweitausend zwanzig jahre alt. 
well I’m uh twenty-two years old
02 .h (.) [ic-
03 SAR:    [*du bis jetzt] #+die#  
now you are the
sar-g *to ANN-------------------
ann-g  +to SAR--->
fig  #fig.1#fig.2

Figure 1. Sara gazes at Anna during her question (line 3)

Figure 2. Anna shifts her gaze to Sara on die? (line 3)

5. Person names in German can generally be preceded by definite articles (see Werth 2016 for 
a sociolinguistic overview), and this allows Anna to hear line 3 as making relevant a name both 
pragmatically and syntactically. See Betz (2015) on some interactional uses of the article+name 
format in third-person reference in German.

6. For indications of multimodal aspects, we use ‘g’ for ‘gaze’, ‘h’ for ‘head’, and ‘b’ for ‘other 
bodily conduct’.
Sara responds to Anna’s self-identification with *okee* (line 5). The particle is produced with low onset and low volume and with falling intonation and stress on the second syllable, which is realized as a monophthong. During the question-answer sequence, Sara maintains gaze on Anna, who establishes mutual gaze on *die?* (‘the’, see Figures 1 and 2). Upon hearing the first syllable of Anna’s name (line 4), the OKAY-speaker Sara already starts to move her head slightly upward (see Figure 3), and she withdraws her gaze at the completion of the answer. On the second syllable of the particle, Sara completes a downward head movement (see Figure 3), and bodily disengages from the sequence (line 5).

As a current tenant, Sara has likely reviewed the list of candidates who applied for the room and is therefore able to recognize Anna by the first syllable of her name. The OKAY in this specific context can thus be taken to mark the answer as sufficiently informative in the sense that it triggers locally relevant recognition for Sara, perhaps of the person with all of the information she had sent; Sara’s early

---

7. The first minute of the recording also captured a sequence in which Anna introduces herself to one of the other participants by name. Sara is physically close to both participants at this time and could have heard the name at that point.
gaze shift in line 4 (after the first syllable of the name) supports this. Since the question was designed to elicit the candidate’s name, the understanding/ recognition claim simultaneously amounts to sequence closure, and it is treated as such: The OKAY-speaker’s bodily disengagement from the side sequence marks her readiness to return to telling in progress (C. Goodwin 1981; Schegloff 1998; Mondada 2015), and the recipient Anna continues her biographical narrative in line 7.

Proposing sequence closure with OKAY is here a corollary of claiming understanding, that is, of treating the answer as appropriate, sufficiently informative, and complete, and doing so in sequentially third position (cf. Schegloff 2007, 37, on the importance of position). Third-position uses claim understanding of new as well as expected information (e.g., just-activated or retrieved knowledge, Excerpt 2), and they receipt confirmations as well as corrections (e.g., disconfirmation of an understanding check). In our collection, third-position OKAYs tend to receipt individual pieces of information, for example background knowledge as in Excerpt 2. This is different for OKAYs in second position.

2.2 Responsive OKAY as understanding claim in larger sequences

OKAY in second position tends to be used to receipt more complex information. This includes recognizing a piece of information as particularly important or relevant within a larger telling. Excerpts 3 and 4 show such OKAYs in larger advice-giving sequences: In Excerpt 4, the OKAY is placed at the end of a phase/a sequence, while in Excerpt 3, the OKAY is placed within a sequence.

Excerpt 3 is taken from a job interview training session, in which the coach TNE uses hypothetical reported discourse (Golato 2012) to model a strategic response to an interview question (lines 1–3). The coachee TBR was not offered a permanent position by his former employer after a probationary period, and the modelling concerns how to deal with this biographical item in an interview.

Excerpt 3. *chefin ‘boss’* (FOLK_E_00173_SE_V_01_DF_01_T_02_00–30–32_00–30–52_c480-c494), 2012, German, face-to-face, job interview training

01 TNE:  ANscheinend hat_s nich gereicht— apparently it wasn’t enough
02 &sodass man dann zum ende der (.)& probezeit so that at the end of the probationary period
03 tbr-h &nods-----------------------------&
04 die zusammenarbeit be&[endet ha]t. the collaboration was ended
05 tbr-h &nods--------->
06 TBR: [hm_hm ]
05 (0.5)
06 TNE: P! ((loud popping sound w/lips))
07 TBR: hm_hm
08 TNE: punkt. (.) nix&ts weiter rechtfertigen;=
period nothing else ((to)) justify
  tbr-h -------------->&
09 =gar nix.nix.dann kommt natürlich
nothing at all then of course comes
10 die frage ja wieso.
the question but why
11 TNE: .hh (0.2)
12 TNE: ich weiß es nich.
I don’t know
13 & (0.7)
  tbr-h &slight nods---->
14 TNE: bleiben sie- (.)&
stay (.)
  tbr-h -------------->&
15 gehn sie nix auf die chefin:=
  don’t go to ((the topic)) of your boss
16 =ham [si#ch mit ihrer] chefin oder=
  have REFL with your.F boss.F or
did you get along with your boss or
  fig #fig.4
17 TBR: ![t=*o*&okay] &
  tbr-g *closes eyes*
  tbr-h &two slight nods&

Figure 4. TBR begins to say okay; (line 17)
18 TNE: =mit ihrem chef verstanden_ (.)
  with your.M boss.M understood
  with your boss
19 <<breathy>>(ja) nee äh> >des war auch irgendwie<
  (well/yeah) no uh that was also kind of
In lines 8–12, TNE suggests that TBR not volunteer a justification, and if one requested in a future job interview, that TBR claim a lack of knowledge of his former employee’s reasons. In line 15, TNE offers another piece of advice, more specifically a warning against a course of action that TBR could reasonably be assumed to consider. Earlier in the interaction, TBR had described the toxic relationship between him and his superior as the biggest problem in his former job and a likely reason for not being offered a permanent position. Additionally, TBR had indicated that he has difficulty addressing this fact in job interviews. In shifting to imperative forms in lines 14–15, TNE can be understood to move out of modelling discourse into an explication of what (not) to do in future job interviews. In this sense, TNE’s turn becomes recognizable as a summarizing move (similar to gist or upshot formulations, Heritage and Watson 1979): This is the essence conveyed in the previous advice sequence. It is receipted with okay; (line 17).

TBR’s okay;⁸ which is preceded by an alveolar click and produced with closed eyes on the first syllable and upward head nods with small amplitude on the second syllable, is not used at a potential sequence closing point. Rather, it claims to understand a chunk of information within the larger advice sequence as particularly significant: It receives what TNE has said as something worth following in practice. TBR responds to imperatives (lines 14–15) whose action relevance is to give advice to be followed or not, and thus claiming understanding amounts to projecting compliance in the future. While TNE receipts the negative imperative in line 15 with okay; TNE elaborates by first offering a hypothetical illustration of what TBR should not say (lines 16–18) and then building the undesirable outcome of engaging in the course of action warned against (lines 21–22, see Hepburn and Potter 2011).

When claims of understanding are not forthcoming at points at which they are relevant or expected, interactants can be seen to pursue such explicit claims. Excerpt 4, taken from the same interaction as Excerpt 3, illustrates this. We join the interactants in a larger sequence in which TNE gives advice for navigating

---

⁸ We did not analyse (potential) systematic functional differences between okee, realized with a monophthong (see Excerpts 2, 6, 7), and okay, realized with a diphthong (see Excerpts 4, 5, 8, 9).
the common interview question “What are your weaknesses?” In lines 1–15, TNE formulates a suggestion for how TBR could skillfully respond to this question and TBR responds to this with okay; (line 20). At issue is TBR’s dislike for desk work.

Excerpt 4. schwäche ‘weakness’ (FOLK_E_00173_SE_V_01_DF_01_T_03_00–56–22_00–56–38_c420-c436), 2012, German, face-to-face, job interview training

01 TNE:   .h während ich im außendienst
while I work with passion
02  mit leidenschaft arbeite, (.).h (.)
on the road
03 muss ich im büro mit disziplin *ar[beiten; ]
I have to work with discipline at the office
04 TBR:         [&hm_mh, &]
tbr-h &two nods&
05 (0.2)
06 TNE:   &DA [muss ich mich immer wie$der %selbst]&( there I have to be ever
sch-g $....TBR-------->
tne-g %...SHO---->
tbr-h &nods throughout-----------------------&
07 TBR:         [das stim*mt *wirklich* ja ]
that’s actually true yes
sh-g *.........*SHO,,,,,,*TNE----------->
08 TNE:   =disziplinieren;=[weil %des% is ei]nfach= disciplined because that is simply
tne-g -------------------------------------->%,,,%
09 TBR:         [&hm_mh ]
tbr-g &nodding--------->
10 TNE:   =da brenn ich einfach *nich.°
that is just not my passion
11 (0.5)
12 TNE:   ich krieg das& +HIN, .h mach ich+
I get it done ((I)) do it
tne-g +...gaze down-----+
tbr-h ----------------------&
13 (0.3)
14 TNE:   a+ber es- ich würd das eher
but it- I would tend to see that
tne-g +...up to TBR (mutual gaze)------>
tbr-g ------TNE-------------------------->
15 als meine &schwä&che sehn.
as my weakness
sh-g &up---&nodding---->
16 (0.6) + (0.2) #(0.2)
tne-b +left hand gesture, lips pursed-->
fig #fig.5
As in the previous example, TNE models how to respond to an interview question, and specifically how to skillfully describe a professional weakness (lines 1–3). TBR receipts the first part of TNE’s suggestion with *hm_mh* and nodding (line 4) and subsequently confirms TNE’s description as apt with *das stimmt wirklich* ‘that’s actually true’. TBR continues nodding in line 12 while maintaining mutual gaze with TNE. In lines 14–15, TNE repeats the wording of the question, thus marking the modeled answer as complete and making a response from TBR relevant.

TBR begins nodding upward when TNE’s turn end is projectable, but he does not produce any other token of understanding of the larger action or acceptance of the suggestion offered. In lines 16 and 18, TNE seems to pursue a more substantial uptake by recompleting the sequence two more times: first as an embodied action with the “turn-completive” hand gesture (Streeck 2008, 184; see also Müller 2004) shown in Figure 5, and then verbally with a backward linking *so* (‘like that’, line 18). By creating another slot for a more substantial appreciation of the advice presented, TNE orients to a lacking (i.e., less than appropriate) response (Ford and Thompson...
375

1996, 176, footnote 19; Schegloff 1996, 56). TNE’s so (line 18) is followed by TBR’s °o↓kay;° (line 20), which is produced with head movement upward on the first and downward on the second syllable, and with gaze on TNE. After the OKAY receipt, TNE moves to a next hypothetical interview question (lines 22–24), one which is marked as self-evident with natürlich ‘of course’.

Excerpt 4 illustrates a broader observation regarding responsive OKAY in our collection: Within larger tellings or advice-giving sequences, OKAY tends to follow other, more minimal responses, such as mhm, ja, or nodding, in receipting informings. Recipients’ differential orientation to these receipts, as is visible in cases in which a nodding or mhm is treated as sequentially less than appropriate, shows that OKAY constitutes a relatively stronger claim to understanding than mhm or nodding. This makes it suitable for marking a piece of information as particularly important or salient (Excerpt 3; see also Koivisto and Sorjonen, this volume, on similar uses of Finnish okei) or for receipting the main point or upshot of a larger sequence (Excerpt 4). Thus, responsive OKAY helps interactants show how they understand larger stretches of talk.

3. OKAY after a change-of-state token

The second use of OKAY in response to informings and narratives in our data is as an understanding claim after a change-of-state token (n=30). Change-of-state tokens in general propose a change in a speaker’s “current state of knowledge, information, orientation or awareness” (Heritage 1984a, 299). In German the most frequent change-of-state tokens are particles and particle combinations like aha, a(c)h (ja), achso (see Betz and Golato 2008; Golato and Betz 2008; Imo 2009; Golato 2010), in addition to other forms like adverbs and phrases (see Imo 2009). Heritage (1984a) describes that in some cases change-of-state tokens do not only display the change of a speaker’s knowledge state, but also display acknowledgement of this new information. However, as Imo (2009) shows, whether the information is acknowledged as sufficient may depend on the prosodic realization of the change-of-state token or the broader sequential context. Therefore, change-of-state tokens are often produced in combination with other particles in order to indicate both the receipt of new information and a revised or newly gained understanding, sufficient for present purposes.

This division of labor is what we observe when change-of-state tokens are followed by OKAY. Speakers display through change-of-state tokens such as ah, aha or achso that they have received information that is new to them. The following OKAY signals that the new information is to be taken as understood and acknowledged. Such OKAYs are used in second position to unelicited narratives and informings and in third position, when informings or narratives have been elicited by the
Okay-speaker. This use of Okay exhibits a uniform distinct multimodal pattern of prosody and head movements throughout almost all of our cases.

In Excerpt 5, taken from the same job interview training session as Excerpts 3 and 4, the coach TNE suggests that the coachee TBR apply for a specific open position.

**Excerpt 5.** *Tolle stelle* ‘great position’ (FOLK_E_00173_SE_V_01_DF_01_T_04_01–28–38_01–29–03_c775-c786), 2012, German, face-to-face, job interview training

01 TNE: ähm herr brandner dann überlegen sie sich ma;  
    uhm Mister Brandner so just consider
02
    stuttgart  
    Stuttgart (city name)
03
    na ja; (.)  
    well
04
    sie ham gesacht  
    you said
05
eigentlich wollen se noch nich umziehn.=  
    you don’t really want to move yet
06
    =[aber das wä]r schon ne tolle stelle;  
    but that would in fact be a great position
07 TBR:  [mhm ]
08 TNE: das kann ich ihn sagen;  
    I can tell you that
09
    aber äh (0.2)  
    but uh
10
    überlegen sich das noch mal;=  
    think it over once again
11
    =schlafen sie drüber.  
    sleep on it
12 TBR:  [((laughs))]  
13 TNE: [.h ähm ]
14
15 TNE: zum ersten ersten  
    by january one
16
    is die stelle zu besetzen.  
    is when the position has to be filled
17 TBR:  [## &’ah*  *okay okaky;&#]  
    oh
    tbr-h  &nods up--&nods twice&
    tbr-g  ->TNE-->*  *gaze down --->
    fig  #fig.6  #
18
    (0.5)*
    tbr-g  ----->*
19 TNE:  *wobei die (.) schon (.) auch  
    though they’re already
    tbr-g  *gaze toward TNE----->
20
    in gesprächen sind;  
    conducting interviews
The coach TNE suggests that TBR apply for a vacant position that he had already mentioned before. Yet, TBR did not show any interest in the position for several reasons. TNE refers to one of them, conceding that TBR had indicated his reluctance to move soon (cf. lines 3–5). TNE, in contrast, claims that the position is desirable and should be considered by TBR nevertheless (lines 6–11).

After his renewed suggestion to apply (line 10), TNE adds that the position is to be filled at the beginning of the following year (lines 15–16, the interaction taking place in October). TBR responds to this informing with the change-of-state token ↑ah with high onset (see Heritage 1984a on oh), thereby treating the information as new. It is followed by the first of two ↓okay with low onset. okay is reduplicated then with fast delivery, falling contour and creaky voice, without any clear stress (line 17). Phonetically, the second syllable of okay is realized as a diphthong. While producing ↑ah, TBR nods upward with a middle amplitude moving his head slightly backward, the climax of the nod being on the first syllable ↓o of okay (cf. Figure 6). On kay, TBR moves his head downward. On the second okay; and in the following pause, two slight nods with smaller amplitude follow. After the change-of-state token indexes that the prior talk offered new information, the reduplication of okay downgrades the relevance of this information.9 This is confirmed by later responses of TBR (not shown in Excerpt 3), which index that he is not interested in applying for the job in question.

We find information receipts and understanding displays in sequence-closing third position to question-answer-sequences as well. An example is Excerpt 6 from the same job interview training as Excerpt 5. The coachee TBR elaborates on his own résumé.

Figure 6. Head movement during ↑ah ↓okay okay; (Excerpt 5, line 17)

We find information receipts and understanding displays in sequence-closing third position to question-answer-sequences as well. An example is Excerpt 6 from the same job interview training as Excerpt 5. The coachee TBR elaborates on his own résumé.

9. For reduplicated OKAY see Kuroshima et al. (this volume). Golato and Fagyal (2008) and Barth-Weingarten (2011a, 2011b) describe a similar use of German jaja (which is a reduplication of ja, ‘yes’), indexing that the information responded to is not relevant to the speaker and that the (topical) sequence therefore should be closed.
Excerpt 6. \textit{ausbildung} `apprenticeship’ (FOLK_E_00173_SE_V_01_DF_01_T_01_00–06–42_00–06–59_c299-c312), 2012, German, face-to-face, job interview training

01 TBR: mit einer (.) bewerbung (.)
with one application

02 bin ich bei schwarz pharma
I got in at Schwarz Pharma ((name company))

03 (0.6)

04 TBR: äh (.) bin ich da reingekommen?
uh I got in there

05 die ham ja seinerzeit
at that time as you know

06 die mussten ja noch die die (.)
they still had to pay the the

07 pharmareferentenausbildung zahlen?
apprenticeship for pharmaceutical representatives

08 .hhh und (.) ähm;
and uhm

09 hab dann auch sofort n unbefristetes an-
(I) then also immediately got a permanent a

10 (0.2)

11 TBR: n unbefristeten arbeitsvertrag;
a permanent contract

12 TNE: in monheim am rhein
in Monheim am Rhein ((place name))

13 ham sie dann die ausbildung gemacht;
you then did the apprenticeship

14 zum pharma;
as a pharma

15 TBR: äh:m--
uhm

16 nee die pharmareferentenausbildung
no the apprenticeship for pharma representatives

tne-g >>gaze at TBR------------->

17 hab ich in (.) in düsseldorf gemacht.
I did in in in Düsseldorf ((place name))

18 TNE: #&*ah ja [lo6kee]a*
I see
tne-h &nods up--&nods down&
tne-g --&gaze down-----*gaze toward documents---->
fig #fig.7

19 mhm,

20 TBR: mhm,

21 (0.31)

22 TBR: und die die fachliche;
and the technical/specialist one
When the coachee mentions that a pharmaceutical company had paid for his apprenticeship for becoming a pharmaceutical representative, the coach TNE produces a confirmation-check regarding the city of the apprenticeship (lines 12–13) as a declarative question with falling intonation. This turn-design presents the information as located within TBR’s epistemic domain and suggests that TNE expects confirmation (Labov and Fanshel 1977, 100–101; Heritage 2012b, 6), probably because he has read TBR’s résumé, which is lying in front of him. TBR disconfirms (lines 16–17) and provides the name of the correct city as a counter-informing (cf. Heritage 1984a, 312).

With the change-of-state token ↑ah ja, realized with a high onset, TNE indicates that he now recognizes this information that probably was not new to him, but that he had remembered incorrectly from TBR’s documents (see Betz and Golato 2008). He claims understanding by using ↓okee with a low onset immediately after the news receipt (line 18). Phonetically, the second syllable of this OKAY is realized as a monophthong. As in Excerpt 5, TNE nods upward (Figure 7). He moves his head upward10 with a relatively high amplitude, while he produces ↑ah ja. The climax of the amplitude occurs during the first syllable ↓o of okee, then TNE moves his head downward on kee. Saying mhm, he invites TBR to continue with his résumé, while at the same time he gazes down to the documents on the table before him.

![Figure 7. Head movement during ↑ah ja ↓okee. (Excerpt 6, line 18)](image)

---

10. DeCarlo et al. (2004, 34) describe this as an “emblem of being ‘taken aback’”. Even if this is too strong as an ascription of the speaker’s state of mind, it is clear in Excerpt 4 and comparable cases that the information given is unexpected, because the OKAY-speaker had stated a diverging assumption before.
In both excerpts, the change-of-state token claims the altered information state of the speaker, while OKAY is used to propose that this information is not only registered but also understood. In 28 of our 30 cases, the combination of change of state + OKAY exhibits a clear ‘multimodal gestalt’ (Mondada 2014a, 2016): During the change-of-state token or during the first syllable of OKAY, speakers lift their head upward with a middle or high amplitude. Before or during the OKAY, they move their head downward again. Amplitude and timing of the head movements vary only slightly. This ‘multimodal gestalt’ occurs irrespective of the bodily arrangement of the speakers and of the interaction type (see also Whitehead 2011, 107–109, who observes a very similar pattern for an example of third-position *Oh*, okay in English mealtime conversation). We even observe it in situations in which recipients stand with their backs to the OKAY-speakers. Figure 8 schematically represents the prototypical head movement.

![Figure 8. The typical head movement accompanying a change-of-state token + OKAY](image)

In contrast to using stand-alone OKAY as an understanding claim (see Section 2), speakers do not only accept information as sufficient, but also indicate that it has been new (or forgotten), if they use a combination of a change-of-state token and OKAY. This applies when OKAY is used in second position (as in Excerpt 5, n=15), but even more importantly in third position (as in Excerpt 6, n=11), when the information was elicited by the OKAY-speaker. In 9 of these cases, change-of-state token + OKAY is produced in response to an answer, objection, etc. that clearly corrects something that had been said by the OKAY-speaker in first position. The change-of-state token indicates that the information is not only new, but also contrasts with prior knowledge, assumptions, or expectations (see also Oloff 2019). The following OKAY is used to indicate that the new, unexpected information has been understood and the original assumption has been corrected. In this regard, we

---

11. In four cases, the sequential position cannot be clearly determined.

12. OKAY can also operate by itself as a change-of-state token which indicates that information is new and unexpected. In two cases in our data, free-standing OKAY works as a change-of-state token and is accompanied by the head movements described above.
find a commonality of change-of-state tokens + OKAY with other usages of OKAY discussed in this paper: OKAY closes sequences that provide sufficient information and thus allows speakers to proceed with an overarching storyline or activity or to move to other topics or activities.

4. OKAY closing larger activities

A third use of OKAY consists of indexing (or projecting) the closure of sequences or topics (n=27). It usually occurs when informings and narratives have already been shown to be understood by recipients. Schegloff and Sacks (1973) have described the use of OKAY in American English telephone conversations as a pre-closing device which indexes that participants do not intend to add anything more to topical talk and are ready to move into the closing of the call. Other research on English and Swiss German has identified the use of OKAY as a juncture between activities (Grosz 1982; Condon 1986, 2001; Bangerter and Clark 2003; Bangerter, Clark and Katz 2004; Fischer 2006), specifically as a device for “entering and exiting joint projects” (Bangerter and Clark 2003, 195). This research seems to suggest that a closing use and a transitional (or projective) use of OKAY coincide and cannot be distinguished (see also Chapter 4, this volume; De Stefani and Mondada, this volume). Indeed, in our data, there are cases in which OKAY closes an informing or a narrative sequence and at the same time fulfills a transitional function; there are also cases in which it is not possible to unambiguously assign only one of these functions to OKAY. Yet, in the majority of cases, close sequential and multimodal analysis allows us to tell apart a closing function from a transitional function, because they exhibit differences in sequential position, prosody, and gaze behavior.

Excerpt 7 is a case in which OKAY is used to close a narrative. Its speaker produces OKAY after having displayed that he has understood the main point of the interlocutor’s story; OKAY then is followed by items which project transition to a next topic. The excerpt is again from the job interview training. The coachee TBR here is about to finish an episode of the narration of his professional career.

13. But see Beach (1993), who specifically deals with the transitional, i.e., projective uses of OKAY. Bangerter and Clark (2003) and Bangerter et al. (2004) distinguish between OKAYs used as a “first word” and as a “last word” (Bangerter and Clark 2003, 205) in speaker’s turns. This difference, however, is not equivalent to the distinction between a transitional use and a closing use, because both can be implemented by stand-alone tokens.
Excerpt 7. *den anderen weg* ‘the alternative route’ (FOLK_E_00173_SE_V_01_DF_01_T_01_00-13-38_00-13-58_c578-c584), 2012, German, face-to-face, job interview training

01 TBR: **und das war da**[mals *der entscheidende punkt*]=
    and that was back then the crucial point
    tne-b
    *moves upper body to table*

02 TNE: [.hhh ]

03 TBR: [weshalb ich gesagt hab;]
    that led me to say

04 TNE: [+ja: _ +]
    yeah
    tne-h +nods 2x+

05 TBR: **nee dann,**
    no then

06 % (0.8) % (0.2) #+*(0.4)+
    tbr-h %nods down-up%
    tne-h +nods---+
    tne-g >>gaze at TBR------->*gaze at documents--->>
    fig #fig.9

07 TBR: **+%geh ich+ den _anderen%& [ weg. ]
    I’ll take the alternative route
    tne-h +nods 2x--
    tne-b %........................%stretches trunk--->>

08 TNE: [[okee; #]
    tne-b &.............
    fig #fig.10

09 TNE: (.) mhm,&
    tne-b ..........&flips through documents--->>

10 (0.8)

11 TNE: .h gut;=
    alright

12 **=dann sind se zu asturias gegangen,**
    then you changed to asturias ((company name))

---

*Figure 9.* TNE is bent forward and gazes at TBR (line 6)
In line 1, TBR projects a telling about a decision made at a certain point of his biography. The projection, however, is not fulfilled immediately. TBR pauses for 1.4 seconds (line 6), during which the coach TNE already receipts the turn underway and indicates understanding of the decision projected by TBR in line 1. During TBR’s narration, coachee and coach gaze at each other repeatedly. As a lengthy pause in TBR’s turn emerges, he nods while gazing at TNE (line 6, Figure 9). The latter responds with a nod. Immediately afterwards, TNE looks down at the documents lying before him on the table (line 6). TNE’s gaze withdrawal indexes completion of the narrative episode (Rossano 2012, 2013) and disengagement from it (C. Goodwin 1981). Since the documents contain TBR’s résumé, the redirection of TNE’s gaze projects his orientation to the telling of the next step in TBR’s career. TNE continues nodding as TBR completes his turn (line 7). After the turn’s recognition point (Jefferson 1984a) is reached (anderen ‘alternative’, line 7), TNE produces okee; (line 8). The second syllable of okee; is realized as a monophthong, and okee; has a low onset, is slightly aspirated, stressed on the second syllable, and produced with a flat, slightly falling contour. In sync with the okee;, TNE stretches his body and reaches for the documents (fig. 10). TNE adds another response particle, mhm, (line 9). After a pause, while still scanning the documents, TNE initiates transition to the next biographical step with gut;=dann […] (lines 11–12). Audible in-breath, high onset and slightly higher volume mark the initiation of the new topic (Couper-Kuhlen 2001, 2004b).

In Excerpt 7, the OKAY-speaker indicates already well ahead of the OKAY that he has sufficiently understood his interlocutor’s turn. The multimodal means for doing this include nodding. Together with TNE’s embodied conduct (gaze-aversion and object manipulation), OKAY here clearly indexes the participant’s orientation to topical closure. Still, the transition to the next activity is not performed by okee;. It is instead realized by ensuing linguistic items, although it is already concurrently projected by gaze-direction and object manipulation. The participant thus can be
seen to orient to different lines of actions at the same time by using different multimodal resources (see also De Stefani and Mondada, this volume).

Excerpt 8 shows another instance in which ‘gazing down at documents + OKAY’ is used to close a topic, this time, however, not by the participant who opens up the next topical sequence. The excerpt is from a staff meeting of a university graduate advisory board. NMW is describing an applicant for a doctoral program, who speaks a Southern German dialect.

Excerpt 8. nächstes thema 'next topic' (FOLK_E_00303_SE_V01_DF_01_T_01_00–21–41_00–21–53_c1160-c1177), 2015, German, face-to-face, staff meeting

01 NMW: kommt aus freiburg,=
           (she) comes from Freiburg ((town name))
02   =und hat auch en ganz leichten dialekt,=
      and also speaks in a very slight dialect
03   =aber [des ][is ja-] .h
      but that’s y’know
04 EMW:     [↑oh:↑]  
            oh
05 RCM:       [hmhm; ]
06 EMW:    wie s[uːʃ; ]
            how cute
07 NMW:    [is ja] immer ganz sympathisch dann s[o.]
            ((that))’s y’know then always quite
      likable kind of
08 EMW:  
           [ j]a;
         yes
09           (0.2)
10 NMW:  <<creaky> ja;;=  
            yes
   emw-g  >>gaze at NMW-->
11 EMW:  =<<creaky> + ja ++genau.>
            yes exactly
   emw-g  ------------------>*gazes away--->
   emw-h       +nods up+
12           (0.3)
13 NMW:  <<creaky> genau.>
            exactly
14           (0.4)+  (0.4)+  (0.2)
   emw-h           +nods down 2x slightly+
15 NMW:  ((lipsmack)) .h
16 EMW:  *cool;*     
        cool
   emw-g  *.....*  
17 FAW:  *gut;#*    
       alright
   emw-g  *gaze at FAW*  
fig #fig.11
NMW and EMW agree on a positive assessment of the applicant’s dialect (lines 6–16). Their mutual agreement in lines 10–13 is realized by particles with a relatively low, creaky voice, and is also expressed in EMW’s responsive nods in lines 11 and 14. The participants do not add any topical or evaluative aspects with the particles, which are mirrored as couplets (lines 10–11: ja – ja, lines 11–13: genau – genau). This sequential organization projects topic-closing in similar ways as Schegloff and Sacks (1973) showed for the use of couplets of assessment and agreement tokens in pre-closings of phone-calls (cf. also Jefferson 1981b, 1–2, and Sorjonen 2001, 261–267, on topic attrition). Moreover, EMW disengages from the conversation by looking away from the prior teller NMW (lines 11–16). Producing another assessment (cool, line 16), EMW turns her gaze to FAW (fig. 11), who is responsible for the next point on the agenda. FAW takes the turn by producing the particle gut (line 17), which, with a falling tone, indexes topical closure (Harren and Raitaniemi 2008), but could already project the transition to a new topic (Meier 2002; Deppermann and Helmer 2013, 21f.). EMW herself signals closure of the prior topical sequence with okay; (line 19). It is in the upper level of her register and produced with a falling contour; at the same time, she looks down at the documents in her lap. By averting her gaze from the prospective next speaker FAW (Figure 12), EMW shows that the okay; is not designed to confirm the shift to a new speaker and a new topic, but that it serves to close the prior topic. After a deep in-breath, FAW then announces the shift to the next topic (line 20).
In Excerpt 8, 'gazing down at documents + OKAY', which implies gaze-aversion from the prospective next speaker, is used to close the prior topic, but not to initiate a new one. Since there have been extended displays of mutual agreement and already various indices of participants' disengagement with the ongoing sequence before, such OKAYs are not used to claim understanding, either.

The difference between closing and transitional uses of OKAY becomes particularly clearly observable in cases in which both uses follow each other in sequential order. This is the case in Excerpt 9, which is again from the graduate advisory staff meeting. In reaction to a topic on RMC’s agenda, FAW informs the others that she had to decline certain students’ applications, because applicants would not be able to pass required exams in time (lines 1–12).

**Excerpt 9.** *zu spät 'too late'* (FOLK_E_00303_SE_01_T_01_DF_01_T_01_00–18–53_00–19–11_c992-c1013), 2015, German, face-to-face, staff meeting

01 FAW: *ich musste natürlich (.) denen abs[agen;]*

I of course had to turn them down

02 EMW: *[ja_ ]

yes

03 FAW: *und es: tut [mir lei]d,*

and I am sorry for that

04 RCM: *[hmhm.]*

05 EMW: *[ja_ ]

yes

06 FAW: *aber sie müssen (0.4) bis anfang oktobe*r, but by the beginning of october you have to*

07 FAW: *hh äh[m] uhm*

08 NMW: *[fertig s]ein;=ne,*

be done, right?

09 NMW: *[mja.]*

yes

10 FAW: *[fert]ig sein;= be done*
FAW closes her informing with a resigned statement (*mal gucken* ‘we’ll see’, line 17) with low voice and adds *okay.* During that turn, FAW, who had been gazing at her addressees before (Figure 13), bends forward and gazes down. ‘Gazing down at documents + OKAY’ is used to index closure, this time by the producer of the informing herself. EMW, who had been treated by FAW as her primary addressee by gaze-direction, also looks down in response to FAW, thus averting her gaze from FAW (Figure 14).
Figure 13. FAW and EMW hold mutual gaze, EMW agrees with FAW with *nee:* (line 15)

Figure 14. FAW closes her informing with *okay*; both gaze down to documents (line 17)

Figure 15. FAW gazes at NMW (far right) and begins adjusting her sitting position, while EMW utters *okay,* still looking at her documents (line 20)
EMW mirrors FAW’s closing *okay*; and utters *okay*; with the same intonation contour while still gazing down at her documents as well (line 20). Meanwhile, FAW turns her gaze to NMW, the participant who is responsible for the next topic on the agenda (Figure 15). EMW aligns with this projected course of action by also gazing at NMW, while producing another *<<h> okay;>* , this time, however, in a high register (line 22; Figure 16). This OKAY, which is distinguished from the prior by high pitch register and looking at the next speaker, is oriented to as making transition relevant by the fourth participant, RCM, in line 25. He had been appointed as speaker on the current (just-ending) topic on the agenda, and FAW’s informing in this excerpt had emerged from his contribution. In line 25, RCM takes the turn, but only to decline to add any yet unmentioned aspects to the current topic.

![Figure 16. FAW and EMW (uttering *<<h> okay;>* ) gaze at NMW, who looks at her documents (line 22)](image)

In Excerpt 9, ‘gazing down at documents + *okay;’ is used in a couplet-like manner both by the producer of the informing and her primary recipient to index topical closure (cf. Schegloff and Sacks 1973). Afterwards, *okay;* with a falling tone, but in high register, is used for the transition to another activity by a next speaker. The transitional use is clearly distinguished from the closing use by speaker’s gaze on the next speaker who is responsible for the next activity and by a shift to a high register (cf. Couper-Kuhlen 2001, 2004b).

In our data, OKAY as a closing device for larger activities co-occurs with a change in body posture (usually a backward move, indexing disengagement as in Excerpt 7, but sometimes also with a repositioning forward move as in Excerpt 9), gaze-aversion from the producer of the turn to which OKAY responds, and/or object manipulation. Gazing at documents combines the orientation to an object that may be transition-implicative and disengagement with the prior speaker. If the OKAY-speaker nods, then nods (and vocal understanding displays, such as *mhmm*) are produced well ahead of OKAY, as an independent prior action. As part of this multimodal gestalt, OKAY primarily indexes sequence/topic closure.
In our data, the use of OKAY as a closing device can be distinguished from its use as a claim to sufficient understanding or as a transition marker, both by virtue of its sequential position and through its prosody (final contour, pitch register) and accompanying embodied conduct (but see De Stefani and Mondada, this volume). If the OKAY-speaker did not indicate sufficient understanding before, a closing OKAY may additionally count as an understanding claim by implication. By default, closing activities can be taken to index that a sufficient understanding for all practical purposes of actions and contents of the prior sequence has been reached, unless speakers have indicated otherwise. This pragmatic default-interpretation bears close similarity to the “action ladder” (Clark 1996, 147) implication of agreements implying understanding, which Clark (ibid., 147f.) calls “downward evidence”. OKAYs which index a transition or which open a new topic or sequence usually come with a different prosody (high onset and/or rising intonation; Mondada and Sorjonen, this volume). Still, the use of OKAY as a closing device can sometimes project the transition to a new sequence/topic as well. This is the case when the OKAY-speaker attends to an object that is related to the next activity/topic (cf. Mondada 2007, 2015), for example written documents that the OKAY speaker turns to. We can see here a division of labor between talk and the body concerning the temporalities of their pragmatic orientations: While the OKAY with falling intonation is primarily retrospective, indexing the closing of the activity, in our data, gaze, object-manipulation and possibly other bodily conduct are prospectively oriented, already attending to the activity or topic to follow (Deppermann and Streeck 2018).

5. Summary of findings

We have been able to identify three recurrent uses of OKAY in response to informing and narratives in German: OKAY employed to claim understanding, the use of a change-of-state token together with OKAY, indexing sufficient understanding, and the use of OKAY to close sequences of topical talk. In the previous sections, we have presented typical instances of the multimodal delivery of these three uses in their sequential context. All instances of OKAY in our collection have a falling intonation contour. Tables 1 and 2 show the larger statistical distributions of head movements and gaze-directions associated with the three uses of OKAY in our corpus.
Table 1. OKAY-uses and first direction of head movement of OKAY-speaker*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nod(s):</th>
<th>Downward nod</th>
<th>Head down</th>
<th>Sideward nod</th>
<th>Upward nod</th>
<th>Unclear/none**</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding display</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-o-s-token + okay</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* X-squared = 57.748, df = 8, p-value = 1.287e-09; Phi/V-coefficient: 0.4676982 (>0.5 = large effect for linguistic data); residuals (the asterics show boxes with significant effects):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>understanding</th>
<th>-0.6331738</th>
<th>-1.756694</th>
<th>-0.7248824</th>
<th>0.1245086</th>
<th>1.1797106</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>c-o-s-token</td>
<td>-1.9069252</td>
<td>-1.783765</td>
<td>-0.6067799</td>
<td>2.5811240*</td>
<td>-1.5281864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>closing</td>
<td>0.9547859</td>
<td>4.808077*</td>
<td>1.8477395</td>
<td>-2.9282579*</td>
<td>-0.3553345</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Initially both categories were analytically divided, and then integrated in one category for statistical reasons.

Table 2. OKAY-uses and gaze-direction of OKAY-speaker*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gaze:</th>
<th>Toward speaker</th>
<th>Somewhere else (incl. documents/text)</th>
<th>Unclear</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding display</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-o-s-token + okay</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing</td>
<td>0*</td>
<td>25*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>58</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* X-squared = 33.752, df = 4, p-value = 8.378e-07; Phi/V-coefficient: 0.3575591 (>0.5 = medium effect size); residuals (the asterics show the boxes with significant effects):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>understanding</th>
<th>1.7498948</th>
<th>-1.6447189</th>
<th>-0.1790548</th>
<th>-0.1790548</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>c-o-s</td>
<td>0.5007831</td>
<td>-0.9309769</td>
<td>0.8616404</td>
<td>-0.6098242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>closing</td>
<td>-3.4443630*</td>
<td>3.7225340*</td>
<td>-0.6098242</td>
<td>0.8616404</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The statistical patterns offer additional distributional evidence for two recurrent multimodal gestalts in the sense of Mondada (2014a, 2016):

- ‘Change-of-state token + OKAY with falling contour + upward nod’ is by far the most frequent multimodal realization of the combination of a change-of-state token (ah, achso) and OKAY (n=28/30, see Table 1). Typically, the upward nod accompanies the change-of-state token and the head moves down again during OKAY.
- ‘OKAY with falling tone + gaze averted from prior speaker’ is associated with sequence/topic closing (n=25/27, see Table 2). In about half of these cases in our data, gaze-aversion means to look down, often at documents, and combines with turning to an object. Consequently, we often observe a head movement downward before the realization of OKAY. In contrast, upward nodding occurs
only very rarely when OKAY is used for closing (n=4/27, see Table 1). Gaze-aversion together with a falling contour of the OKAY is typical of the closing use of OKAY in our data, whereas transitional uses rather are realized by a rising or level contour together with gazing at the next speaker or at the addressee of the upcoming turn. Yet, since our focus was on OKAY with a falling contour used for claiming understanding and/or closing a topic/action sequence, we cannot provide statistical evidence for the robustness of this form-function correlation in a comparable sequential environment.

The use of OKAY as an understanding claim in third as well as in second position in larger tellings, narratives, and advice-giving sequences, does not occur that regularly in a uniform multimodal gestalt. Yet, there is a strong tendency for OKAY to emerge together with nodding (n=58/75, see Table 1), mostly nodding in an upward direction (n=44/75). With respect to the coordination of nodding and OKAY, our findings do not present clear patterns. While change-of-state tokens are typically accompanied by nodding, and OKAY in its closing function is more often preceded by nods, the timing between nods and OKAY as an understanding claim is more variable; nods appear before, on, and after the particle.

The findings concerning gaze behavior are in line with previous research on gaze as a display of (dis)engagement. When claiming understanding (alone or together with a change-of-state token), the OKAY speaker gazes at the prior speaker in slightly more than half of the cases (n=58/105, see Table 2), while this never happens if OKAY is used to close the sequence/topic.

Gaze and nodding thus are of primary importance in signaling different kinds of responses; postural changes and object manipulation can matter in addition to this. Our study highlights the importance of two characteristics of nodding which have not yet figured prominently in prior research:

- Its direction (upward vs. downward) is especially distinctive in signaling the receipt of new or corrective information.
- The timing of nods vis-à-vis linguistic items disambiguates meanings: Nods (which include minimally a movement into two directions) have to be distinguished from head movements into only one direction (such as only lowering the head). When nods are used as receipts and understanding claims (by themselves or together with other response particles) and are followed by OKAYs without head movement, these OKAYs index the closure of the sequence/topics. When nods are used shortly before or synchronous to OKAY, the relationship of upward and downward movement of the nods with regard to the production of linguistic items supports the specific contributions of individual lexical items for receipting and claiming understanding of informings and narrative parts.
6. Conclusion

Our study contributes to knowledge about the coordination of verbal and embodied resources and their organization as complex multimodal gestalts for claiming understanding and closing topics and sequences. Our findings show that neither sequential organization nor prosody nor co-occurrence with other linguistic items alone sufficiently account for the specific local use of OKAY in face-to-face interactions. Rather, complex multimodal gestalts which combine lexis, prosody, gaze and head movements account for different uses of OKAY in the same kinds of interactional environments. These multimodal gestalts are both simultaneously and sequentially ordered. Yet, our study does not answer the question whether the multimodal gestalts we have identified are specifically tied to the use of OKAY. It may well be that they are more general and can be used with other similar lexical tokens as well. For example, gaze-aversion may also appear with other response tokens (like gut, hmhm, ja) to close a topic/sequence (cf. Rossano 2012, 2013, C. Goodwin 1981 for the general role of gaze in closing sequences), and nodding up may be used to index the understanding of new information together with other tokens (like ja, hmhm) as well. As these examples suggest, the distinctive role of bodily conduct for the interpretation of lexical items may be similar for particles and particle combinations other than OKAY. Complex multimodal gestalts thus may be more general and more abstract than we have been able to prove within the scope of this article. These hypotheses are to be tested in future studies.

Multimodal gestalts do not account for all instances of the three uses of OKAY that we have studied. There is a tension between the use of recurrent patterns, which are highly routinized, easily recognizable and readily intelligible, and the indexicality of the flexible use of bodily resources. The bodily behavior of the OKAY-speaker and its temporal characteristics are sensitive to all kinds of situated contingencies: multi-activity, the availability of objects and their relevance to possible next topics and sequences, writing tasks, the (availability of) prior speaker’s gaze, seating arrangements, etc. Therefore, if speakers do not use a routine multimodal gestalt, this does not mean that bodily behavior does not contribute to the local meaning of OKAY or that it is employed at random. Rather, non-canonical uses can be seen as situative adaptations which attest to participants’ orientation to finding a solution which is uniquely adequate for just this specific situated contextual configuration (cf. C. Goodwin 2000).

Funding

Emma Betz’s work was supported by Canada Foundation for Innovation funding for the creation of a Social Interaction, Language, and Culture Lab at the University of Waterloo (CFI-JELF project #37510).