

How sustained gesturing supports interactional projects

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More than twenty-five years ago, Fox, Ford and Thompson called for more research into the role of gesture in turn-taking, but – with some notable exceptions – the resulting studies have been relatively sparse. In this talk, we consider the phenomenon of sustained gesturing by a speaker of a multi-unit turn. Examples are drawn from the CIARA corpus of ten hour-long, multi-party English conversations recorded in the Kimberleys. On some occasions, speakers will talk for up to five minutes accompanied by unbroken sequences of gestures. On others, speakers will produce extended talk with no gesturing at all, which indicates that the role of gesture is – unlike intonational, grammatical and pragmatic resources – not an essential resource for holding the floor. In this talk, we explore the role of sustained gesturing in holding the floor, in tandem with intonational, grammatical and pragmatic resources: how gesture is used to help set up multi-unit turns; how gestures bridge otherwise potential intonational, grammatical and pragmatic completion points; and the role gestures play in ending such multi-unit turns. We argue that when it is used, sustained gesturing is effective for keeping the floor until the end of the multi-unit turn.

Rod Gardner is Honorary Associate Professor at the University of Queensland, and a member of the CIARA team in a four-year ARC Discovery project based at Macquarie, which is investigating conversational interaction in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia. He has used Conversation Analysis in his research for three decades, investigating response tokens, classroom interaction, and Australian English and Garrwa conversation. He recently submitted a co-authored book with Ilana Mushin on classroom interaction in the early years of schooling, focusing on instructions for tasks.