

Paralanguage and gesture in a corpus of Skype conversations: “... okay so good luck with that ((laughing))?”

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CASE: Corpus of Academic Spoken English (forthcoming)

- **200+ hours** of Skype conversations between speakers of English as a Lingua Franca, currently being compiled at Saarland University, Germany
- Partners from Bulgaria, Spain, Italy, Sweden, Finland, France, Belgium, and L1 reference components from the UK and the US (planned)
- Topic prompts, academic context, 30-60 min.
- Allows research in the areas of:
 - English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)
 - Lexical innovation
 - Pragmatics & Discourse Analysis
 - Computer-mediated communication (CMC)
 - ...



CASE website: tinyurl.com/CASEproject



Research background: Video communication

- Research on **Skype** as oral, synchronous and dialogic discourse type **not very extensive**
- Research on **video-conferencing** as a predecessor of Skype:
 - Video and audio channels **imitating features of face-to-face interactions, facilitating** informal communication (Fish et al. 1993: 50f.)
 - **Additional benefits** of an audio-visual video connection: visual backchannels, non-verbal responses and non-verbal response forecasting, gesture-based support of descriptions, non-verbal expression of attitudes, better pause management (Isaacs and Tang 1994)





Research background: Video communication

- Research on **video-conferencing** as a predecessor of Skype:
 - Contributing to a “markedly richer, subtler, and **easier [communication] than [...] telephone** interactions” (Isaacs and Tang 1994: 67)
 - CMC **facilitates intercultural communication** regardless of national boundaries (Gong 2005: 1)
 - But “**distance still matters**” (Olson and Olson 2000: 173) - issues with the audio channel such as “**delays, echoes, [and] incomprehensible audio quality**” pose a substantial **threat to** successful interpersonal **interactions** (Tang and Isaacs 1993: 193f.)





Research background: English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)

- ELF “orients to **achieving mutual comprehension**” between speakers of different language and cultural backgrounds (Mauranen 2012: 7)
- In ELF “differences from native English that achieve this [successful intercultural communication] [are] regarded **not** as **deficiencies** but as evidence of **linguistic adaptability and creativity**” (Jenkins 2015: 45)
- ELF as a **set of strategies** aimed at achieving mutual and situated comprehension (Mauranen 2012)



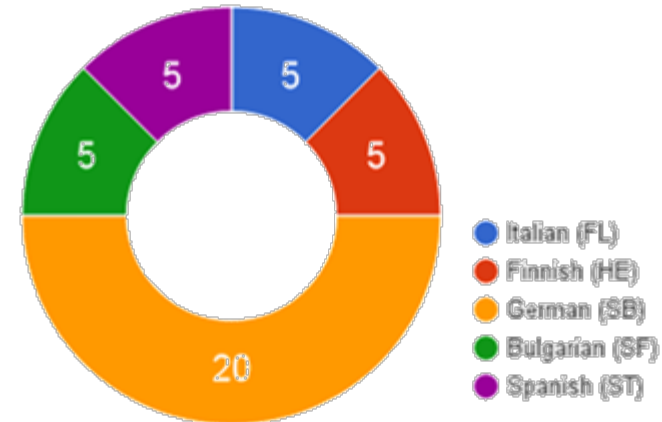
Subcorpus for quantitative analysis: BabyCASE (forthcoming)

BabyCASE

775 mins (13 hours) of Skype conversations from CASE
(ca. 115 000 words in the annotated version)

Composition:

- 5 conversations each from CASE SB-SF/FL/ST/HE
- 10 hours video, 3 hours audio,
duration: 30-45 minutes, various topics
- Average age: ca. 23 years, 70% female, 30% male
- Average time learning English: 12.4 years



Paralanguage

Rapport management: Laughter in delicate situations

Laughter as a method for successful rapport management in CASE
(cf. Schmidt 2015)



- Rapport management
 - General features (Spencer-Oatey 2002, 2005): politeness & laughter
 - “Harmony between people” (Spencer-Oatey 2000: 16)
 - Positive effect of interaction; bonding (Provine 2000)
 - Secondary effect: Tension release and signalling relief (Gregory 1924, Grotjahn 1957, Meierkord 2000)
- In a CMC situation
 - Increased situational delicacy
 - Novelty
- Create a feeling of non-seriousness (≠ humorous)

01SB01SF01:

SB01: I can hear you,

SF01: o:h great,

... at last._((thh))

yeah ((laughing)) that's true,



Paralanguage

Rapport management: Laughter in delicate situations

Apart from humorous contexts, laughter is also used as a method for successful rapport management in CASE (cf. Brunner, Diemer and Schmidt forthcoming)

- In a CMC situation: Increased situational delicacy / novelty
- Laughter contributes to creating rapport between interlocutors (Spencer-Oatey 2002) by creating common ground and reducing the situational awkwardness (cf. Chafe 2007)
- As a means of mitigating a delicate situation, for example embarrassment, by indicating non-seriousness (Chafe 2007), where a potentially problematic situation can be defused by means of laughter (Jefferson et al. 1987: 172)



01SB01SF01:










SB01: I can hear you,

SF01: o:h great,

... at last._((thh))

SB01: yeah ((laughing)) that's true,

Transcription: Laughter

| | | |
|---------------|---|--|
| ((LAUGHS)) | separate, loud laughter |  |
| ((laughs)) | separate laughter |  |
| ((laughing)) | laughing while speaking |  |
| ((chuckles)) | chuckle |  |
| ((chuckling)) | chuckling while speaking |  |
| ((thh)) | aspirated minimum laughter starting with alveolar plosive sound |  |
| ((ehh)) | monosyllabic laugh pulse |  |
| ((hehe)) | short chuckling |  |
| ((heh)) | initially aspirated monosyllabic laugh pulse |  |



Example: Laughter

07SB49FL33:

SB49: u:hm,

I think it's like u:hm ... like,

yeah typical stereotype Sauerkraut ((German (1.2))),_((ehh))

FL33: ah,

okay.

€€€

SB49: uhm,

Knödel ((German (0.8))),

.. I don't know if there is a word in English for that? [((chuckles))]

FL33: [((LAUGHS))] (...)

FL33: I'm sorry for this conversation like half an hour talking about food,
and I haven't eaten yet.

SB49: ((ehh))

FL33: ((ehh))

SB49: I think we don't have to talk the whole time about food,
[it's just],

FL33: [no no].

SB49: to start the conversation ((laughing)).

FL33: yeah of course but still I'm like mhm I'm hungry ((laughing)).





Laughter as a key element in interaction



- SB17: and I always find nice places where I think oh I-
one day I wanna g-
I would like to go there too,
and .. if I'm not student anymore I can afford a bit [more],
- SF10: [yeah].
- SB17: ((heh)) .. yeah.
that's always .. uhm,
[yeah you always]-
- SF10: [so if] I need a .. a vacation,
I: .. know .. **((heh))** .. that I can turn to you **((chuckling))**. **((chuckles))**
- SB17: **((heh))** you- you could yes you could **((chuckling))**.
if you [don't have] **((chuckling))**,
- SF10: [that's ()], **((laughs))**
- SB17: if you don't have u:h offices in- in in Bulgaria?

Example “Travel agency” (CASE 07SB17SF10)



Laughter as a key element in interaction



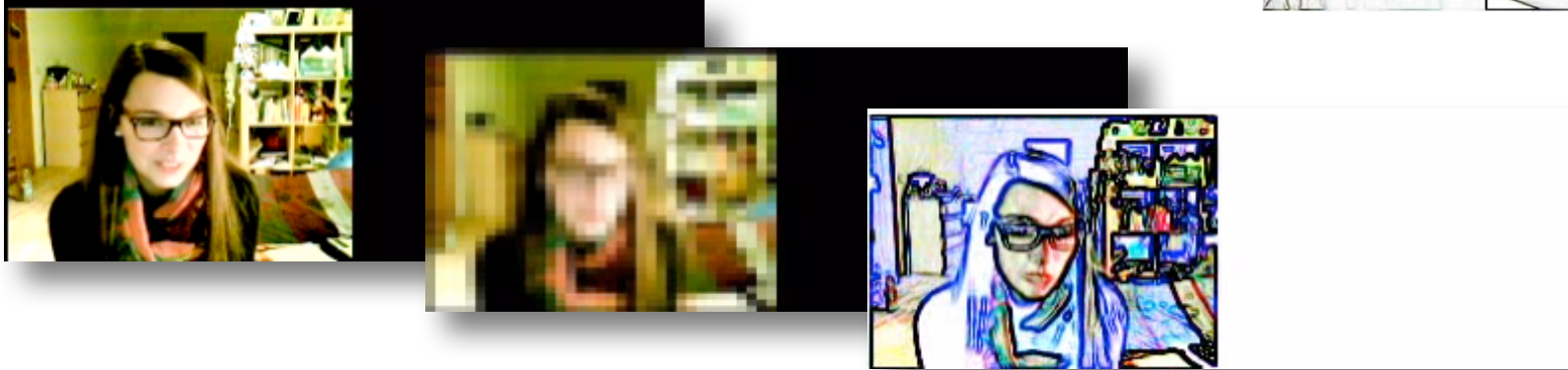
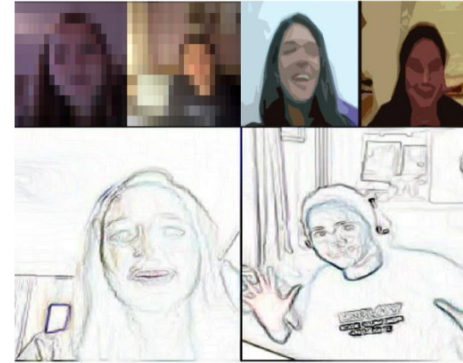
- SB24: .. people can come to me.
and I like have to give one lesson a week,
I should talk something?
like how they ... should read their material,
and .. what they should read and things like that,
I don't know.
- SF15: .. oh my god,
you're so cool. **((laughs))**
- SB24: .. I'm not,
I'm just working for the professor. **((laughs))** ...
- SF15: (1.0) well: <y- you are I mean> who gets to do that,
I don't get to do it.
- SB24: ... <I'm> sure you're going to get to do it.
if you already started off like that, **((laughs))**

(CASE 11SB24SF15)

Gesture in video: Anonymisation



- Several filtering possibilities
- Preservation of features relevant for linguistic research
- Gestures, stance, facial expressions, material objects



Gesture in video data

- Multimodal explanations and gestures (e.g. backchannels, greeting, leave-taking)
- Turn-taking through multi-modal means (e.g. facial expressions, gestures, stance)
- Third-party interference or participation
- Objects as topic focus



Transcribing spoken data: Discussion



“Books”



Transcribing spoken data: Discussion



“Books” (CASE 03SB27FL25)

- 1 SB27: I have so much books here that I .. bought,
2 but .. I can't read them. ((hehe))
3 FL25: look,
4 I mean .. we have dictionaries,
5 yes, dictionaries,
6 but ther- but there are also books there somewhere,
7 uhm?
8 and I have SO many books to read
9 .. SO: FRUstrating,
10 because I like to read them all at the same time,
11 and it's [...] so frustrating,
12 a:h.
13 SB 27: ((ehh))

it's just,

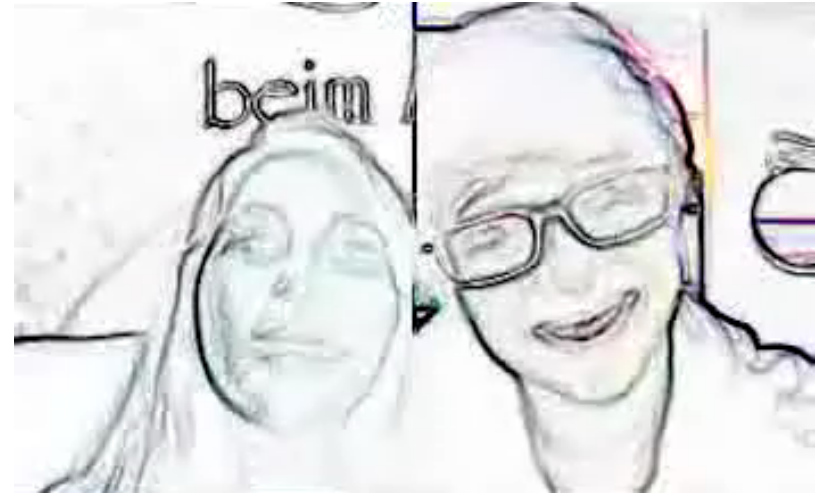


Transcribing spoken data: Discussion

“Books”

Issues:

- Gestures (pointing, emphasis, turn-taking)
- Facial expressions
- Laughter
- Physical stance
- Multimodal explanations
- Camera perspective
- Object focus
- ...



The role of multimodal features in ELF conversations: Case study

“Pretzels”: Audio analysis



1 ST07: [so] °ho-°,
2 my .. m:;
3 I would like to know,
4 .. how is a,
5 .. German pretzel? ((ehh))
6 SB57: (1.3) uhm so,
7 (1.4) uh[m:],
8 ST07: [for ins]tance,
9 .. ho- .. how it is made?
10 ... is it uh .. uh .. how can I say, is it uhm ... more
like a biscuit?
11 ... is it more like a bread?
12 SB57: (2.2) it's uh .. hm .. hm,
13 I'd say it's actually more like .. m:;
14 (2.0) <uh> ... hm,
15 (1.5) also ((German (0.3))) .. uhm uh,
16 .. uhm I know that,
17 uhm: pretzels are made by,
18 .. being dipped into .. kind of an acid?

19 ST07: ... mhm=
20 SB57: =that's why they have this,
21 .. brown .. crust things,
22 ST07: ... yes,
23 SB57: .. and there are salt on them,
24 ST07: ... mhm,
25 SB57: .. and they are usually .. like (2.0),
26 .. they have a knot in them,
27 like the- .. they have [this eight, eight] kind of shape.
28 ST07: [okay okay]
29 SB57: .. so,
30 ST07: [m:],
31 SB57: [are] are these the pretzels you have too?

Example “Pretzels” (CASE 07SB57ST07)

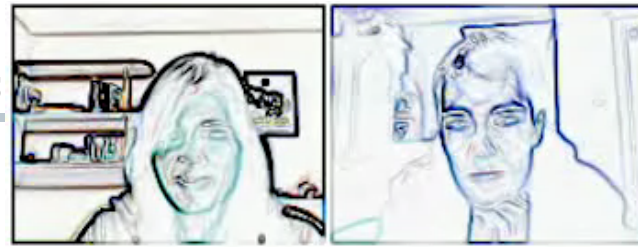
The role of multimodal features in ELF conversations

“Pretzels”: Video transcript



1 ST07: [so] °ho-°,
2 my .. m;,
3 I would like to know,
4 .. how is a,
5 .. German pretzel? ((ehh))
6 SB57: (1.3) uhm so, **{raising hands with palms facing up}**
7 (1.4) uh[m:],
8 ST07: [for ins]tance,
9 .. ho- .. how it is made?
10 .. is it uh .. uh .. how can I say, is it uhm ... more
like a biscuit?
11 ... is it more like a bread?
12 SB57: (2.2) it's uh .. hm .. hm,
13 I'd say it's actually more like .. m;,
14 (2.0) <uh> ... hm,
15 (1.5) also ((German (0.3))) .. uhm uh,
16 .. uhm I know that,
17 uhm: pretzels are made by,
18 .. being dipped into .. kind of an acid? **{imitates dipping}**

19 ST07: ... mhm=
20 SB57: =that's why they have this,
21 .. brown .. crust things, **{outlines crust of a pretzel}**
22 ST07: ... yes,
23 SB57: .. and there are salt on them, **{imitates sprinkling salt}**
24 ST07: ... mhm, **{nodding}**
25 SB57: .. and they are usually .. like (2.0), **{showing the shape of a pretzel with his index fingers and performing a repeated tying motion}**
26 .. they have a knot in them,
27 like the- .. they have [this eight, eight] kind of shape. **{uses index fingers to indicate the shape}**
28 ST07: [okay okay]
29 SB57: .. so,
30 ST07: [m:],
31 SB57: [are] are these the pretzels you have too?



Shaking head



HE03: okay so is it are you actually recording at the moment?

SB106: yeah.

HE03: okay.

yeah [that's fine].

SB106: [I started] right,
... with the call but,
yeah,

I can delete the beginning so,

HE03: no it's fine I don't I don't mind **{shaking head}**.
[it's],

SB106: [okay]. ((laughs))

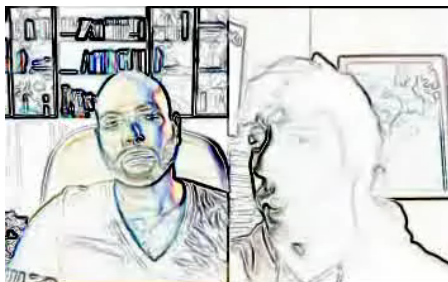
HE03: ganz egal ((German (1.5))),
.. für mich ((German (1.2))).

SB106: oh you can speak German.

HE03: yeah a little bit,

(CASE 07SB50FL34)

Shaking head



- FL34: (1.0) interpreting is like thirty four PLAcEs .. and translation is sixty four.
.. so it's like .. HA:LF .. the people that GET inside .. th- .. [the: .. u:h],
SB50: [oh okay].
FL34: .. first degree.
SB50: mhm.
FL34: and you do- you have to count people from outside from other universitie:s,
.. and you have to count people who didn't,
.. uh .. PASS .. the TESTS .. the: .. years before and they're crun- so it's-
{shaking head}
(1.0) a:h fucked up it's s:o fucking difficult
.. [to get] in THERE.
SB50: [mhm],
FL34: (1.0) it's: .. really difficult. #00:36:31-9#
and I know- .. I will .. try .. both: .. tests?

(CASE 07SB50FL34)

Shaking head



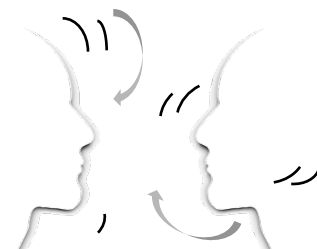
- HE01: .. "oh"?
and well one and a half year isn't too bad.
- SB75: .. <yeah> that's okay, #00:16:30-7#
.. I can see the end already?
{pointing to the side and looking there} <so>,
HE01: [[(laughs)]]
SB75: [[(laughs)]] so its reachable.
so .h.
- HE01: yeah .t well London is a .. **{shaking head}** is a great city I- I ah,
I want to move there ((thh)),
or live there.
- SB75: .. oh really,
you ALso.
- HE01: .. "yeah".
- SB75: it's amazing we can have a coffee THERE then.
[if we are both living there? ((hehe))]

(CASE 01SB75HE01)



764 instances of transcribed non-verbal behaviour in the preliminary transcripts

- **Nodding** (283 instances in BabyCASE) most frequently co-occurs with “yeah” (110), “mhm” (47), “right” (16), and “okay” (17) (within three preceding and following words), i.e. in more than **two thirds** of the contexts (67%) indicating (and emphasizing) **support and agreement**
- **Shaking head** (45 instances) does not only indicate (and underline) **negation** (co-occurring with “no”, verbal negation, “not”, also with questions, in 32 instances), but also **despair** (“it’s so fucking difficult to get in there”); **awe** (“London is a great city”); **uncertainty** (“in England or something like that”); **self-correction** (“for getting a teacher [...] (1.7) for becoming a teacher?”); **lack of alternatives/resignation** (“everybody else just has to deal with some chocolate” as a gift); **signaling lack of understanding** (“what what one?”); and **word search**



Quantitative analysis: Gestures in BabyCASE

- **Shrugging** (24) is used, for example, in cases of **uncertainty** (“I don’t know why”); **to indicate normalcy** (“I think it’s pretty much, like any other country in the world nowadays?”); **to mark a lack of knowledge** (“I’m missing the word?”); **lack of alternatives/resignation** (“that’s what it is”); **acceptance** (“{shrugs} right” as a response to the description of an unusual combination of subjects at university); **to indicate a lack of preferences** (“you want to go first or should I? [...] Go ahead {shrugs}”); **exasperation/frustration** (“it doesn’t make sense, why is the table female?”); **disapproval** (“the topic is not, ((hehe)) {shrugs}”); **embarrassment** (“it’s kind of embarrassing to admit, [...] but, {shrugs} yeah”); and for **emphasis in combination with discourse markers** (“yes well {shrugs}”)



Quantitative analysis: Gestures in BabyCASE

- *Pointing* (13) is used to **indicate objects** in the physical surroundings; to **refer to oneself** or the **interlocutor**; to signal **general direction** (“the north part of the city”); and for **metaphorical pointing** (“I can see the end already”)



“ ”

- *Air quotes* (10) are used when the English term is **unknown** (resulting in approximation, code-switching or paraphrase), but also for **vague or unexplained** terms (“Christmas stuff”); **imprecise/generalizing terms** (“Catholic” country); to **distance oneself** (Catholics “believe”); and to **signal irony** (being able to watch a lecture “again and again”)

Quantitative analysis: Gestures in BabyCASE

- **Mimicking actions** (7) are used to represent particular activities, such as putting eggs in a bowl, limping, or whipping, and to indicate shapes, such as the shape of a tortilla.
- **Waving** (6) is used for leave-taking in BabyCASE, sometimes reciprocally
- Instances of **leaning forward** (3), e.g. indicating engagement at the beginning of the conversation (“How are you {leans forward}”), and **leaning back** (4), e.g. to signal a possible closing point of the opening, or a topic (“that’s cool {leans back} ((clears throat))”).



Quantitative analysis: Gestures in BabyCASE

- First insights into the **interplay** between gestures and spoken discourse
- Point to tendencies regarding co-occurring words and, by extension, possible **functions** of gestures in conversations
- Need to be supplemented by a more detailed (qualitative) **context analysis** of the individual occurrences to give a more comprehensive view of the dynamic nature of communication and the meaning-making processes involved

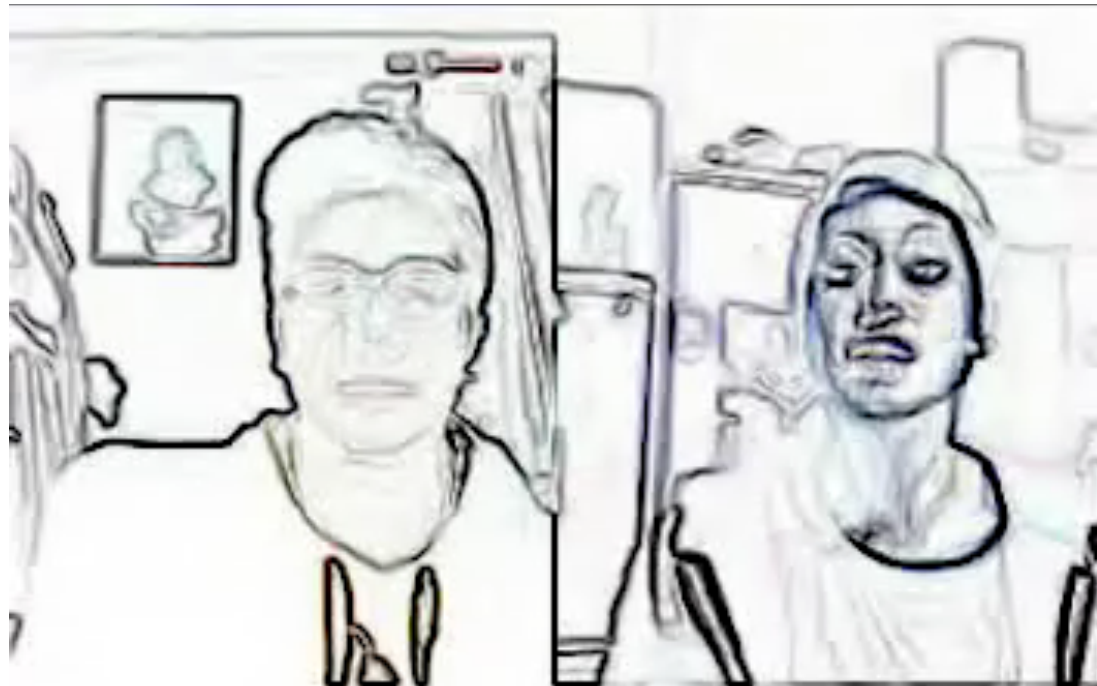
→ **Gestures as key elements of linguistic meaning-making**



Complex gestures

“Beer” (CASE 03SB47FL21)

- Off-screen communication
- Multimodal explanation
- Objects as topic focus
- Physical stance



Complex gestures

“Beer”: Analysis

- 1 SB47: yeah we're always in the kitchen drinking and [watching],
2 FL21: [yeah ((laughing)) ()]
3 **{SB47's roommates shout in the background}**
4 SB47: [OH..YEAH?]
5 .. YEAH? **{turns head to look at the roommates and nods}**
6 they are protesting but [it is reali]ty.
7 FL21: [it's true ((laughing)) ()],
8 SB47: they are also like,
9 always,
10 like,
11 uh,
12 here. **{holds a bottle of beer up with her right hand and points to it with her left index finger}**
13 Beer? **{holds the bottle up to the screen}**
14 WE NEED BEER and,
15 wine, ((laughs)) **{holds a glass of wine up with her left hand and raises it to the camera,**
and her roommate, off-screen clinks it with her glass}
16 EVERY time, ((laughs))



Summary: The role of multimodal features in ELF conversations



Paralanguage and gestures provide **additional cues** to understanding in ELF conversations

- Laughter as a humor device and a means of mitigating awkward situations and creating rapport
- Gestures:
 - Backchanneling, turn-taking, greeting, leave-taking, stance
 - Supportive and descriptive gestures, multimodal explanations
 - Camera perspective as pointing mechanism, object showings
 - Third party intervention and off-screen communication

(cf. also Brunner, Diemer and Schmidt forthcoming)





Thank you!

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