

**PRE-PRINT VERSION.** Jacquin, Jérôme. 2018. “Multimodal Positioning and Reference in Argumentative Talk-in-Interaction: Balancing Context-Dependency and Context-Independency.” *International Review of Pragmatics* 10 (2): 198–218. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18773109-01002004>.

## **Multimodal Positioning and Reference in Argumentative Talk-in-Interaction: Balancing Context-Dependency and Context-Independency**

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### **Abstract**

Drawing on a descriptive and language-oriented approach to argumentation, this paper explores the multimodal dimension of argumentation in talk-in-interaction by considering the various resources used by an opponent to refer to and position themselves in relation to the target of their opposition, namely the adverse position and/or the person who expressed it. More specifically, it studies how speakers exploit multimodal strategies in order to both maintain their discourse at a high level of generality (orientation to context-independency) and guarantee the indexicality of the position taken in the interaction and the disagreement (orientation to context-dependency). The analysis is based on two data collections documenting settings where all participants are temporally and spatially co-present: (i) a video-recorded corpus of Swiss French public debates and (ii) a video-recorded corpus of New Zealand English management meetings. Examining the role of multimodal orchestration of choices in gaze direction, deictic gestures, and speech in establishing different positions in argumentative events such as public debates or management meetings reveals specific contextual features of the activity types, participation frameworks, and sociolinguistic backgrounds involved in an argument.

### **Keywords**

positioning; talk-in-interaction; indexicality; generality; multimodal gestalts; public debates; management meetings

### **Biographical Note**

Jérôme Jacquin is Senior Lecturer in Linguistics at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland. He is also Research Associate on the Language in the Workplace Project, led by Janet Holmes at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. His research draws on insights and methods from Text & Interactional Linguistics and Multimodal Conversation Analysis to investigate verbal resources and practices in ordinary, professional, and institutional settings. His focus is primarily argumentation in talk-in-interaction in political debates and workplace meetings, and he is currently working on indexicality and epistemic stancetaking from a multimodal perspective.

### **1. Introduction**

This paper explores multimodal argumentation in face-to-face interaction. More precisely, it focuses on the resources that the opponent uses to refer to and position themselves in relation to the target of their opposition in argumentative situations. The hypothesis is that coordination between linguistic devices, pointing gestures, and shifts in gaze direction can be used simultaneously by the arguer to stand up against *both* the specific participant defending the contested position in the situated argumentative interaction *and* the ideological position of that participant. From a rhetorical perspective, by using the multimodal strategy analyzed hereafter, the arguer strikes a balance between argumentation as being designed for a specific audience and argumentation as being framed for a “universal audience” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1958). In pragmatic terms, the combination of various semiotic resources

appears to be a way to provide an argumentation that is at the same time context-dependent, or indexical, and context-independent, or general.

The present paper reconsiders therefore a typical pragmatic issue, relating to the role played by context in the production and interpretation of meaning and, more precisely, of reference (Bublitz and Norrick, 2011; Horn and Ward, 2006). Context is tackled here both as the unit's *situational* and *sequential environments*. On the one hand, the latter highlights the fact that actions accomplished in talk-in-interaction (e.g. asking a question) are “context-shaped” by the units that come before them as well as “context-renewing” for the units to come after them (Duranti & Goodwin, 1992; Heritage, 1984). Sequentiality also concerns the cotextual relationship between the different units forming the action that is considered (e.g. a question can be formed by two utterances, the first being a preface for the second). Sequential analysis therefore requires looking closely at the order of the units, since their meaning depends in part on their position in the flow.

On the other hand, the unit's *situational environment* encompasses the various contextual features that are *simultaneously* relevant to the unit considered. That ranges from socio-discursive information about the speech setting (i.e. activity type, participation framework, roles of the participants) to the meaning conveyed by other semiotic resources used at the same time (e.g. a pointing gesture accompanying a concession, a shift in gaze direction combined with a negation). As is now well accepted, embodiment plays indeed a crucial part in face-to-face interaction and multimodality has become a major field of research. The sequential analysis described above is then enhanced by a multimodal analysis that pays particular attention to the semiotic environment of the unit considered.

The sequential and multimodal analysis of the relationship between verbal units and their context will be performed on data collections documenting two “activity types” (Levinson, 1992) where all participants are temporally and spatially co-present and argumentation plays a crucial role. The first corpus consists of public debates organized in the French-speaking part of Switzerland, while the second documents English management meetings held in New Zealand. As noted above, the present paper focuses on a multimodal strategy by which speakers refer to the contested position both in an indexical (i.e. context-dependent) and a general (i.e. context-independent) way. Examining and—to a certain extent—contrasting the two data collections will highlight the role of contextual features associated with differences in terms of activity types and sociolinguistic backgrounds, as well as some specific resources pertaining to the balance between context-dependency and context-independency. The two case studies support the argument that taking a multimodal perspective is relevant to and important for developing a stronger understanding of positioning during argumentative events.

Section 2 briefly introduces the theoretical framework for the study of multimodal argumentation in talk-in-interaction. In Section 3, an overview of the semiotic resources used for multimodally making reference is given. Section 4 provides an analysis of various extracts documenting both data collections, and Section 5 discusses the results and further lines of research.

## **2. Multimodal Argumentation in Talk-in-Interaction**

This paper draws on a descriptive and language-oriented approach to argumentation as it is linguistically and sequentially implemented in written or oral talk-in-interaction (Doury, 1997; Jacquin, 2014; Jacquin and Micheli, 2012; Plantin, 1996, 2012). Argumentation is here defined as a specific way of dealing with disagreement and conflict by the construction and consolidation of opposing positions with respect to a controversial question (e.g. “should we introduce a minimum wage?”). In argumentation, arguers are expected to *justify* and *position* their standpoint in the argumentative situation (Angenot, 2008; Jacquin and Micheli, 2012).

On one hand, *justification* refers to the activity of putting forward at least one utterance (an argument) as a support for another (the standpoint), a relation which is usually cued by a connective such as “thus” or “because”. On the other hand, *positioning* highlights the importance of the dialogal (i.e. multi-participatory) or dialogical (i.e. polyphonic) context in which the argumentation operates. To be meaningful, argumentative positions need to be situated in the disagreement, i.e. each arguer has to – at least minimally – take the other’s position into account, and refer to it.

The coordinated analysis of textual justification and interactional positioning calls for an interdisciplinary approach to argumentation, namely through the combination of notions and methods provided by Conversation Analysis (e.g. Sidnell and Stivers, 2013), Interactional Linguistics (e.g. Selting and Couper-Kuhlen, 2001) and Text Linguistics (e.g. Adam, 2008; Halliday and Hasan, 1976). Despite their differences, these fields can be adopted as complementary approaches to examine the use of linguistic units in the production, interpretation, and negotiation of argumentation in talk-in-interaction (see also Jacquin, 2014, pt. 2, 2018, for a more detailed discussion).

The above language-oriented approach to argumentation can also be connected with the latest developments in the multimodal analysis of talk-in-interaction, a sequential analysis of verbal interaction that systematically takes the embodied dimension of talk into account (e.g. Deppermann, 2013; Müller et al., 2013; Sidnell and Stivers, 2005; Streeck et al., 2011). From this perspective, particular attention is paid to the interfaces between syntax and prosody, speech and gesture, and speech and gaze direction. Linguistic resources are more generally analyzed as emerging in “Multimodaler Verdichtungsräume” [Multimodal Compaction Zones] (Stukenbrock, 2015)<sup>1</sup> and as being integrated in “*complex multimodal Gestalts* that are both specifically adjusted to the context and systematically organized” (Mondada, 2014: 140). The application of such a framework to argumentative communication and, more precisely, to argumentative face-to-face interaction is still an emerging area of research. Regarding the “justification” component, the participation of gestures and shifts in gaze direction in the segmentation of talk in argumentative moves is addressed in Jacquin (in press\_a), whereas Jacquin (in press\_b) focuses on the coordination between some argumentation schemes (e.g. argument from definition, argument from example) and specific gestures (e.g. metaphoric grasping gestures). The present paper focuses on the “positioning” component, by examining the role of embodied conducts in *making reference* to the opponent and the contested position they defend. This issue is addressed in the following section.

### **3. Multimodal Reference to People and Discourse in Talk-in-Interaction**

In face-to-face interaction, reference to people as they endorse a discourse supporting a position can be achieved multimodally, by selecting different semiotic resources and combining them in complex, multimodal practices. As documented in the extracts analyzed below, specific linguistic devices, pointing gestures and (shifts of) gaze direction are typical resources associated with person reference and reference to discourses and points of view.

At the *linguistic* level, such resources are verbal indexicals, proper names or noun phrases (e.g. Stivers and Enfield, 2007) articulated along with two well-documented dialogic devices: reported speech and/or polyphonic markers. While direct or indirect reported speech can be used to quote or reformulate a discourse as well as the embedded and contested point of view endorsed by another participant (e.g. Holt and Clift, 2007; Munoz et al., 2004), polyphonic

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<sup>1</sup> As indicated by one reviewer, see also Norris’ notion of ‘modal density’ (2004, Chapter 4). For an overview and general references on multimodality as a new perspective within argumentation studies and pragmatics, see the introduction to the current volume.

markers – e.g. negations, concessions – convey the contested point of view but do not attribute it to someone in an explicit and verbal way (e.g. Bres et al., 2005; Ducrot, 1984).

As discussed below, such devices can be associated with *pointing gestures* and *shifts in gaze direction*, which are well-known indexical resources for *referring* to something or someone in face-to-face interaction and selecting it as the focus of joint attention more or less independently of what is happening at the verbal level (e.g. Rossano, 2013). Analyzing pointing gestures requires a consideration of both the part of the body that is used (e.g. finger, hand, elbow, chin) and the trajectory drawn in the sequential environment where the gesture is performed (e.g. Goodwin, 2003; Hindmarsh and Heath, 2000; Kendon, 2004). Finally, *gaze direction* is usually used – at least in Western cultures – to manage speakership and reciprocity (i.e. *who* is talking to *whom*), (e.g. Goodwin, 1981; Lerner, 2003; Rossano, 2013). In other words, for the speaker to gaze at someone is a way to address (i.e. to *refer* to) them as being the recipient, while for the recipient to gaze at the speaker is a way to display orientation towards the speaker and their discourse. However, because continuous gaze from the speaker to the recipient is generally marked and therefore conveys additional information (e.g. seduction or aggression), speakers can sometimes use gaze direction to build joint attention in – i.e. to *refer* to – something or someone else, for instance a third party that is listening to the conversation but is not properly addressed. In that case, the shift must be quick and carefully positioned since shifting gaze direction from one participant to another at certain specific sequential points can be understood as a shift of reciprocity or even as a solicitation by the speaker (Stivers and Rossano, 2010).

The reference to X as being at the origin of the contested position can be theoretically achieved by a unique linguistic device such as “Mister X said P”, without requiring any embodied complement (e.g. a pointing gesture, a shift in gaze direction). Multimodal reference through the selection and combination of different semiotic resources (e.g. a polyphonic negation associated with a pointing gesture and/or a shift in gaze direction) is however very common in the data analyzed below. The hypothesis is that such combinations can help the speaker to strike a strategic balance between context-dependency (indexical referencing to the contested position) and context-independency (general reference to the contested position).

#### **4. Multimodal positioning and reference in multi-party face-to-face interactions**

Both corpora studied hereafter document multi-party face-to-face interactions where embodiment plays a crucial role in the expression and management of a disagreement and the occurrence of multimodal argumentation. However, they differ in terms of activity types (public debate vs. private management meetings) as well as sociolinguistic backgrounds (Swiss French vs. New Zealand English). Examining these corpora provides insights into the context-dependency of the resources and processes used to refer to the contested position and the participant who expressed it. In other words, the multimodal strategies analyzed below index and exemplify different issues related to the context considered: while balancing context-dependency and context-independency is used as a way to deal with the presence of the audience in the Swiss French public debates, it functions as a way to politely mitigate the expression of disagreement in New Zealand English management meetings.

##### **4.1. Public debates**

The first data collection to be considered consists of eight video-recorded public debates organized by student associations from 2007 to 2009 at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland. The language used is French and the topics addressed are diverse, ranging from

ecology to the funding of universities.<sup>2</sup> These debates are local forms of political confrontation where embodiment plays a crucial role: disagreement among co-present participants is a way to enhance the intelligibility and accountability of different ideological positions. Public debate can be considered an argumentative genre (Jacquin, 2014) since the invited participants are expected not only to hold an opinion on a controversial question in front of the public, but also to support it with arguments by taking others' arguments and positions into account (see also Lewiński and Mohammed, 2015; Van Eemeren, 2010 on other forms of “political deliberation”). The role of gaze and gesture in configuring the disagreement and making the action of opposition accountable in such public debates has been studied by Jacquin (2015b).

Emphasis here is put on a specific case of multimodal resources being used to manage the context (in)dependency of the argumentation provided: the arguer starts using a wide reference (i.e. a *general* reference to a more or less large group of more or less identified individuals), which is then narrowed, or *indexed*, by the use of a pointing gesture or a shift in gaze direction. In that way, the arguer can address the public with a general, context-independent counter-argumentation while indexing a co-present opponent as the target of the argumentation provided.

The first extract is taken from a public debate about the relationship between advanced studies and work opportunities. The current speaker (DUMO) argues in favor of the spontaneous initiatives undertaken by the universities and quotes “[the] Bologna [Process]” as an example, despite the fact that it is often criticized.

**Extract 1 / ETU-EMP / 00:37'50''<sup>3</sup>**

1 DUMO [...] il faut également:/ #1 (.) heu (.) aider les unis à  
 [...] *there is also a need #1 (.) eh (.) to help the universities*  
 2 prendre des ini#2tiatives heu (.) personnelles\ on on a beau  
*to undertake spontaneous #2 initiatives\ no matter how much*  
 3 (.) des fois (.) critiquer #3 heu #4 bologne/ #5 mais je trouve  
 (.) *sometimes (.) one criticizes #3 eh #4 bologna #5 but I think*  
 4 que c'est quand même un un très beau projet/ (...) qui a été  
*it is nonetheless a great project/ (...) which was taken (...)*  
 5 pris/ (...) l'initiative a été prise PAR les universités/ [...] *the initiative was undertaken BY the universities/ [...]*

| DUMO   | SANS   | MARR   |
|--|--|--|
|                               |  |  |
| #Im1 (camera 1)  | #Im1 (camera 2)  |  |
| #Im1 (“there is also a need to help the universities to undertake”)<br>DUMO is gazing at her notes on the table. |  |  |

<sup>2</sup> Data were collected as part of a doctoral research project about argumentation and categorization in public debates (see Jacquin, 2014 for the published version).

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix for transcription conventions.





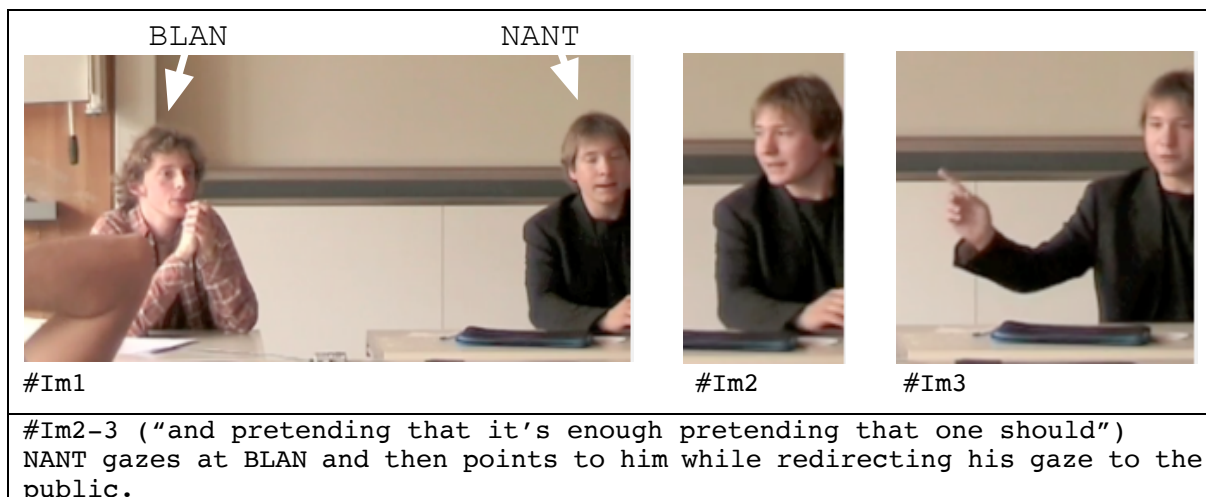
In lines 2-3, DUMO concedes “no matter how much sometimes one criticizes Bologna”. Due to the French indefinite pronoun “on” [one, you, we, they] (e.g. Jacquin, 2017; Jonasson, 2006; Rabatel, 2001), the expression “one criticizes” carries a general and indistinct referential extension: it refers to anybody who would defend such an anti-Bologna position. As shown in image 2, DUMO starts the utterance while gazing at the public. Interestingly, she progressively directs her gaze to the participants on her left (images 3 and 4). The indefinite reference provided by “one criticizes” is then specified in a second step by a strategic shift in gaze direction towards previous speakers – SANS and MARR, among others (see image 1) – who embody the contested position. However, this shift is quick, as shown by the return to the initial position (image 5) before the word “mais” [but].

To sum up, the shift in gaze direction is a way to reduce the referential extension, which was primarily indeterminate by the use of “on” [one, you, we, they]. Thus the speaker succeeds in keeping the reference to the criticism towards the Bologna Process at a general level while she corporally and indexically attributes it, in front of the public, to specific participants in the debate.

Extract 2 is taken from a public debate about whether students must be helped with grants or loans. Immediately preceding the extract studied here, NANT presented a new funding model where a student must repay their loan only if they earn more than 60,000 Swiss francs per year after completing their studies. A member of the public – PUB10 – has just argued that this model is unfair in comparison with student grants. In the extract below, NANT replies to PUB10.

**Extract 2 / PRE-BOU / 00:49'09''**

- 1 NANT mais on aimerait bien avoir que des b- bourses pouvoir assurer des  
*but we would very much like to have only grants to ensure*
- 2 bourses à trente pour cent de la population\ (.) on en a y a pas  
*grants to thirty percent of the population\ (.) we don't there are*
- 3 les moyens\ (.) et #1 prétendre (.) [QU'IL SUFFIT/ (.) #2&  
*no resources\ (.) and #1 pretending (.) [that it's enough/ (.) #2*
- 4 PUB10 [XX XXX
- 5 NANT &prétendre #3 qu'il faut: augmenter les impôts:/ (.) imaginons  
*pretending #3 that one should raise taxes/ (.) let us imagine*
- 6 juste ça\ (.) vous croyez franchement\ qu'on augmente les impôts:\  
*that\ (.) you really think\ that we raise taxes\*
- 7 (...) ça passera que l'augmentation/ (.) sera destinée à financer  
*(...) that it will go through that the raising/ (.) will be used*
- 8 les bourses d'études/ (...) vous croyez franchement [...]  
*to fund grants/ (...) you really think [...]*



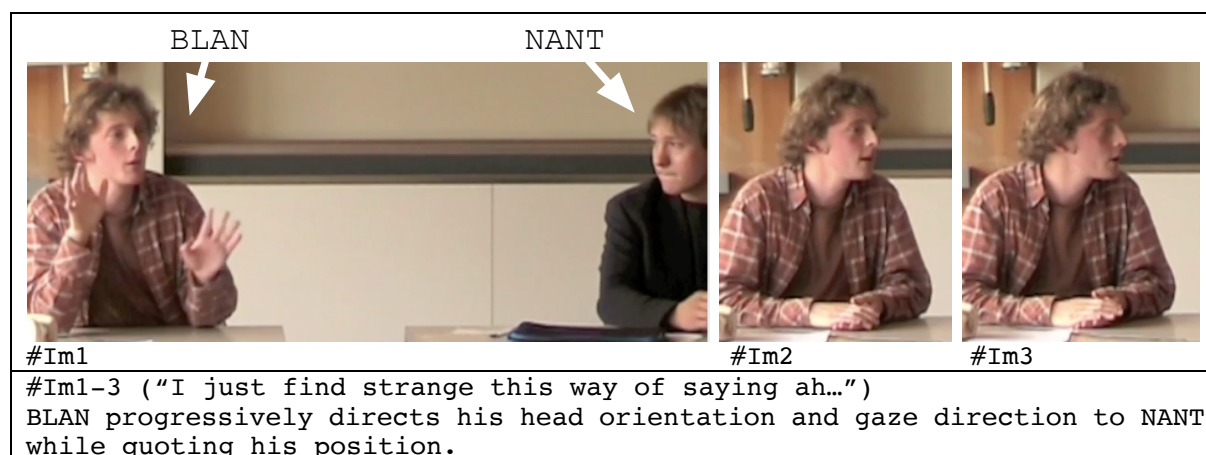
In lines 1-2, NANT concedes that everybody would prefer grants over loans. However, in lines 2-3, he argues that the financial resources are lacking. He then anticipates the counter-argument that the solution to get more money for grants would be to raise taxes. To do that, he uses the word “prétendre” [pretending], which is polyphonic in French (e.g. Berrendonner, 1981). In other words, it is a way for the speaker to report speech and at the same time to state that the embedded point of view is generally contested. Furthermore, with the participle “pretending” – or the infinitive “prétendre” in the original formulation – no agent is mentioned. The potential referential extension is thus very wide and general, consisting of an indefinite number of people who would agree with the content of the proposition embedded under “pretend”.

Interestingly, the speaker uses a multimodal strategy to progressively narrow the reference. While the first “pretending” is produced while gazing at the public (line 3, image 1), he then looks at the other guest – BLAN – when producing the second “pretending” (lines 4-5, image 2). Finally, he points to him when redirecting his gaze to the public (line 5, image 3). The general, context-independent point of view introduced by “pretend” is in some way attributed to BLAN. In doing so the reference of the counter-argumentation is both reduced and indexed in the speech context. While opposing PUB10, whose status as recipient is maintained by gaze direction, NANT shows his awareness of the speech setting and the activity type in which his argumentation takes place. NANT must definitely answer PUB10, but at the same time he needs to maintain the confrontation, in front of the public, with the other guest. Using the multimodal strategy described above, NANT groups PUB10 and BLAN in a “coalition” (Bruxelles and Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2004) to which it is possible to oppose with the same arguments. In other words, PUB10 and BLAN are indexed as representatives of the same general, ideological position against which NANT takes a stance.

In Extract 3, BLAN reacts to what NANT has just said in Extract 2.

**Extract 3 / PRE-BOU / 00:50'53''**

1 BLAN alors je trouve juste que c'est bizarre cette façon de dire ah #1  
*so I just find strange this way of saying ah #1*  
2 augmenter les impôts de toute façon ils voudront pas #2 les  
*raising taxes no matter what they will not want that #2 the*  
3 élus qu'y a à berne #3 et les g- les gens #veulent pas\ c'est  
*the deputies in bern #3 and people do not want that\ that is*  
4 une drôle de façon de faire de la politique quand on fait de la  
*a funny way of doing politics when one does*  
5 politique on a quand même l'idée pour changer les choses (...)  
*politics one wants to make a difference (...)*



The strategy is similar to the one in Extract 2: the infinitive (“dire” [saying], line 1) introduces reported speech that is not time-bound nor explicitly attributed to someone who would be responsible for it (compare with “you said”, “he said”). In that way, BLAN addresses a general position, which is context-independent enough to be potentially endorsed by anybody. However, as shown in images 2 and 3, BLAN simultaneously indexes his intended opponent – NANT – through a shift of head orientation and gaze direction.

#### **4.2. Management meetings**

The second data collection consists of six video-recorded management meetings, held from 2004 to 2006 in a film production company in New Zealand.<sup>4</sup> The language used is English and the goal of the meetings is to discuss practical issues (human resources, security, schedule) as well as more long-term changes (business model, company philosophy). As noted by previous studies, New Zealand English speakers tend to strongly mitigate or even avoid direct expressions of disagreement (Holmes, 1995; Holmes and Marra, 2004; Marra, 2012; Stadler, 2006). Speakers of New Zealand English, especially at work, tend to avoid the use of stance markers (“but”, “however”, “I disagree”) or reported speech that quotes or reformulates the contested position. Additionally, the frequent use of mitigation strategies, such as hedges (“I think”), gambits (“I mean”, “you know”), concessions and hesitations, underlines the strong dispreference associated with disagreement. However, as noted by Stadler (2006) and Marra (2012), disagreement does occur in New Zealand workplaces. Jacquin (2015a) has observed that, in the absence of direct and explicit reference to the opponent, negative formulations associated with shifts in gaze direction make the disagreement “accountable”, in ethnomethodological terms, and therefore compensate for

<sup>4</sup> Data were recorded by the Language in the Workplace Project at the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand (for information on the project, see Holmes et al., 2011).

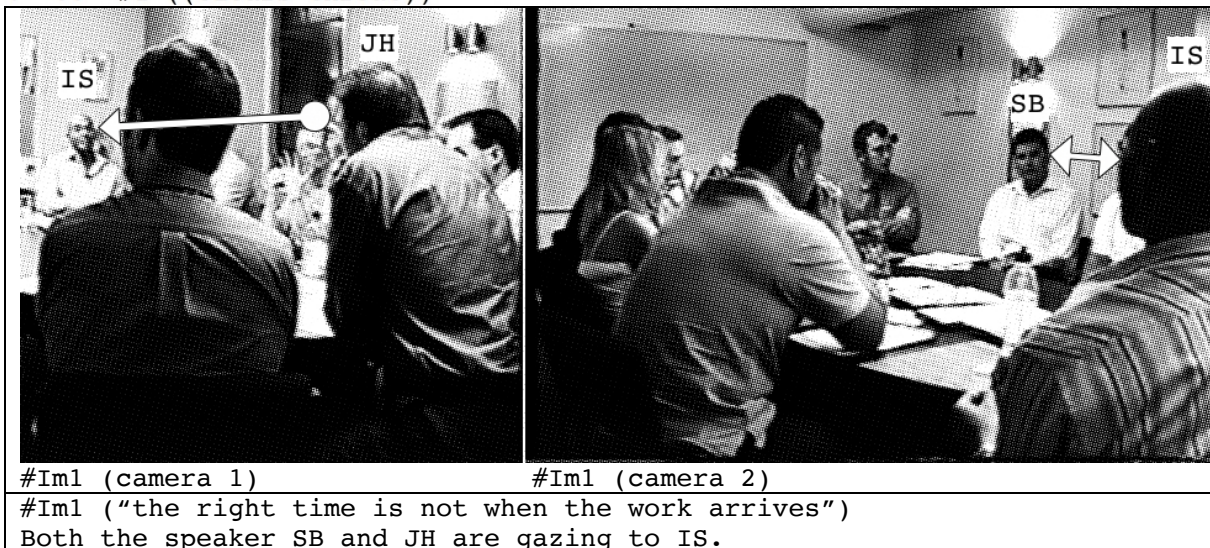


these speakers' preference for verbal indirectness. As discussed below, such a multimodal strategy relates to the balance between indexicality (i.e. context-dependency) and generality (i.e. context-independency) in the expression of disagreement.

The extracts analyzed hereafter are taken from a two-hour management meeting, a large portion of which has been spent deciding whether to hire a new technical operator, Sue. A couple of days before the meeting, Sue had been separately interviewed by Jason (JH), the General Manager, Seamus (SB), the Managing Director, and Ivo (IS), the Pre-Press Manager. During the discussion, both JH and SB underline the urgency to hire someone and acknowledge Sue's skills and expertise. In contrast, IS expresses doubt about the relevance of Sue's specific skills in view of the evolution of the operational workflow the company will have to face in the near future.

**Extract 4 / AMVM-02 / 00:47'04''**

1 SB %+¶(that is) you know i don't know what t- what t- when you think  
 sb %looking at IS----->end of extract 5  
 jh +looking at IS----->end of extract 5  
 is ¶looking at SB----->end of extract 4  
 2 the right time is but um  
 3 (1.4)  
 4 IS yeah  
 5 (0.3)  
 6 SB the right time is not when the work arrives  
 7 ?? #1 ((clears throat))



In line 6, SB's utterance "the right time is not when the work arrives" is an argument in favor of hiring Sue as a new operator. Sue is already available, and hiring her at that specific time is better than waiting for the workload to come. SB's negative formulation is polyphonic. Following work by Ducrot (1972) and Nølke (1992), a negative formulation is considered polyphonic when it consists of a point of view (POV) contesting another, conveyed by the positive form. While SB takes POV1 [the right time is when the work arrives] into account, he only endorses POV2 [POV1 is false]. At the verbal level, POV1 tends to be a general, universal proverb. There is no verbal indexical such as "you(r)" which would ground the validity of the utterance in the specific speech situation. However, when considering gaze direction, we see that both SB and JH are gazing at IS (image 1, cameras 1 and 2).<sup>5</sup> While SB mitigates the disagreement by verbally keeping the argument at a general level, gaze

<sup>5</sup> The fact that JH's back is turned, at least in part, to the camera makes the identification of his gaze direction difficult. However, when zoomed in, it is apparent that his head is clearly turned to IS and not to the speaker, SB.

direction, shared with JH, appears to be a way to index IS as a potential endorser of the contested POV (POV1).

The following extract is the direct continuation of Extract 4.

**Extract 5 / AMMVM-02 / 00:47'12''**

8 IS no ¶ #1 that's right (...) i mean that  
     is ---¶shift to table----->11  
 9 (1.2)  
 10 IS yeah (...) well it ((sighs)) u:m (...) my- my thing is (...) is  
 11 ¶ the (1.0) #2 she is a person who can put impost together quickly  
     is ¶shift to SB----->13  
 12 JH mhm  
 13 IS but ¶ she won't be able to she won't (...) know ¶ where to put them  
     is ----¶shift to JH-----¶mult.shifts SB/JH->  
 14 #3 (...) that's that's where we [the bottleneck is XX]



#Im1  
 #Im1-3

#Im2

#Im3

IS gazes at the table (image 1), then shifts gaze direction to SB (image 2) and ends by producing multiple shifts between JH and SB (image 3).

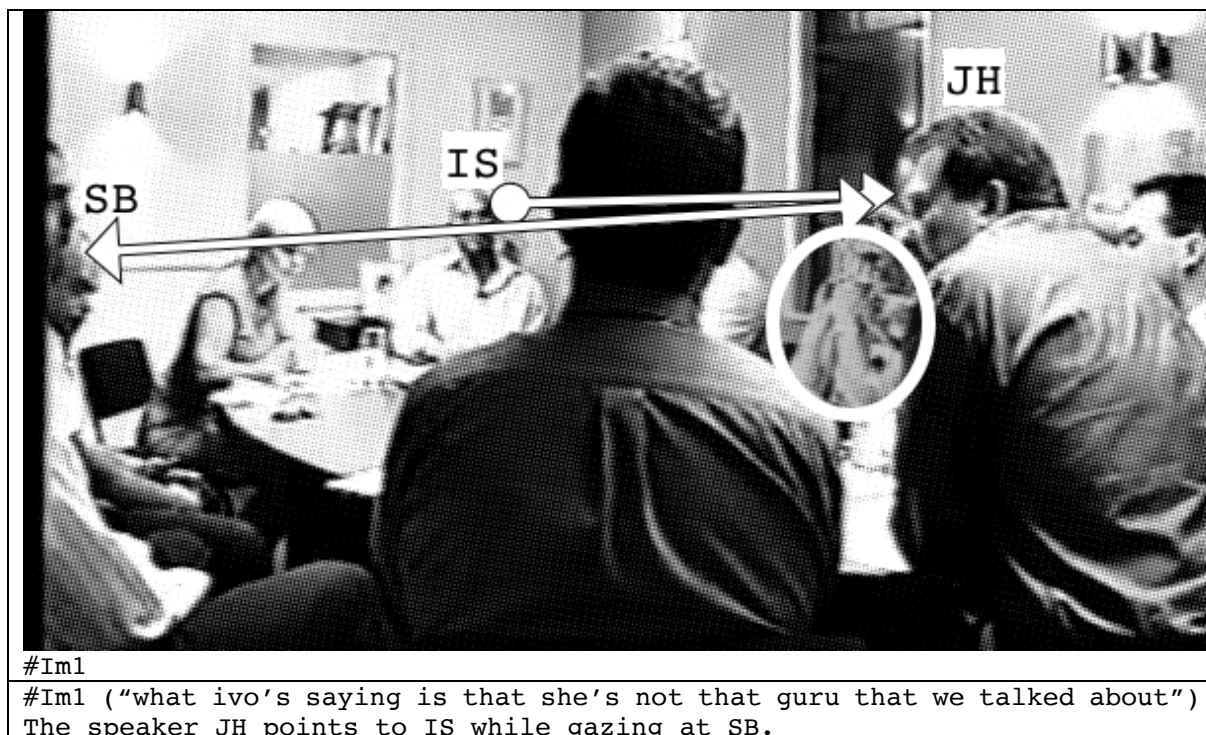
In line 8, while gazing at the table, IS starts with a concession (“no that’s right”, image 1). In line 11 (image 2), he shifts gaze direction to SB and describes Sue in a positive way: “she is a person who can put impost together quickly”. JH agrees (line 12) and IS starts looking at him while introducing his counter-argument through a negative formulation (“but she won’t be able...”, line 13) before concluding with “that’s where the bottleneck is” (line 14). This contests JH’s own identification of the “bottleneck” several minutes before the extract. By shifting gaze direction during the negative formulation (image 3), IS seems to group SB and JH as people committed to the POV contested by the negation.

The same strategy of combining a negation that embeds a contested POV with a shift in gaze direction, which indexes a participant to the interaction, is visible in the next extract, where JH takes the floor to rephrase IS’s position about Sue.

**Extract 6 / AMMVM-02 / 00:47'40''**

30 JH +so % what what #1 ivo's saying is that she's not that guru that  
     jh +shift to SB----->36  
     sb ---%shift to JH----->32  
 31 we talked about [she's not going  
 32 IS [yeah she is not % she's not the  
     sb -----%shift to IS----->end  
 33 [(layout guru X)] she's the one that maybe&  
 34 ?? [XX XX XXX ]  
 35 JH [um XX XXX ]  
 36 IS &+creates the template really quickly  
     jh +shift to IS----->end  
 37 JH mhm





In lines 30-31, JH uses indirect reported speech to reformulate IS's argument. This reformulation is addressed to SB by gaze direction, while, at the same time, JH points to IS (image 1). Both JH's indirect reported speech and IS's agreement (in lines 32-33) embed a polyphonic negation ("she's not a/the guru"), which potentially attributes to SB, or *indexes*, the general, contested POV "she is a/the guru [the company needs]". In doing so, JH makes use of a variety of modes (gaze, speech, head orientation, and gesture) to not only show that he is taking IS's position into account, but also to mediate the direct confrontation between SB and IS.

## 5. Discussion and final remarks

The aim of this paper was to examine the role of gaze, gesture, and speech in balancing *indexicality*, i.e. the context-dependency, and *generality*, i.e. the (relative) context-independency, of counter-argumentation in talk-in-interaction. On one hand, argumentation is a verbal activity performed in situations where divergent positions are supported or reported by those taking part in the discussion. On the other hand, argumentation is also designed to move beyond such context-dependency: it is both based on and the basis for the discussion of values and ideologies (e.g. Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012; Wodak and Meyer, 2009). When SB argues that "the right time is not when the work arrives", he is not only arguing in the specific context where the sentence occurs, but he is also reactivating anticipation as a frame of mind, or as a professional ideology. The data showed that the balance between indexicality and generality in argumentative face-to-face interaction can be struck multimodally, that is by selecting various semiotic resources and combining them in "complex multimodal Gestalts" (Mondada, 2014). Arguers can avoid the use of verbal indexicals and, in doing so, maintain the utterance at a high level of generality (e.g. a proverb) while, at the same time, they can use gaze direction or pointing gestures to ground (or *index*) the argument in its discursive and interactional context. In other words, arguers do not need to choose between indexicality and generality; they can speak generally and contextually at the same time.

The way indexicality is locally managed tells us something about the speech situation involved. In Swiss-French public debates, the multimodal strategies analyzed adapt to the

*trilogal* dimension of the interaction (Kerbrat-Orecchioni and Plantin, 1995; Plantin, 1996), where the Proponent, the Opponent, and the Third Party are embodied by different people or groups of people assuming complementary roles. Using the strategies described above while addressing the public (i.e. the Third Party), the Opponent can oppose both the co-present Proponent (i.e. orientation towards indexicality) and the ideological position the Proponent stands for (i.e. orientation towards generality). In doing so, the Opponent tackles the media pressure of finding a balance between “*objectivity*” and “*adversialness*” (e.g. Clayman, 1992; Hutchby, 1996), i.e. between “*informing*” the public about relevant political issues and “*entertaining*” it by producing attacks on the Proponent (Charaudeau, 2005).

In New Zealand-English management meetings, similar multimodal strategies are employed as ways of “disagreeing without being disagreeable” (Marra, 2012) in a context where disagreement is strongly mitigated, and indirectness and softening strategies are frequent. While verbally echoing general issues and values potentially shared by other participants, speakers can multimodally index a contested position in the ongoing discussion, and therefore show their concern for the practical issues addressed by specific collaborators.

From here, various suggestions for further lines of research can be made. On the rhetorical side, the multimodal strategies discussed above seem to participate in building a speaker’s *ethos*, which Classical Rhetoric defines as the more or less strategic or intentional and argumentatively oriented image of the self that the speaker gives for themselves through talk (Amossy, 1999; Aristotle, 1954). Speakers seek to inspire confidence in order to enhance their persuasiveness. While *ethos* has been primarily analyzed at the verbal level, it is now well accepted that *ethos*, like communication in general, is multimodal (e.g. Constantin de Chanay and Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2007; Jacquin, 2014, sec. 10.3; Poggi and Vincze, 2009). Regarding the topic addressed in this paper, a potentially fruitful research direction would be to analyze the *ethos* constructed through such strategies. Data from both corpora suggest that multimodal strategies which attack the Opponent while keeping the argument at a high level of generality can be used to show: (i) the arguer’s interest in and consideration for what the Opponent says, and (ii) their ability to take a step back from the controversy by adopting a more general point of view. This, of course, requires further investigation.

On the linguistic side, taking multimodality into account calls for a revision of what we know about some verbal indexicals and how they are used to refer to people. The French pronoun “on” [one, you, we, they], for example, is often described as a resource by which the speaker can “anonymize” the referent, unlike “I”, “you” or “we” (Jonasson, 2006; Riegel et al., 2009: 364). This is surely true from a structural and logo-centric perspective on communication. A multimodal analysis suggests, however, that even when “on” is used for context-independent generalization at the verbal level, it can be simultaneously combined with the use of very precise and context-dependent referential resources (e.g. a pointing gesture or a shift in gaze direction) within the same “Multimodaler Verdichtungsraum” [Multimodal Compaction Zone] (Stukenbrock, 2015; see also Jacquin, 2017). The same can be said about polyphonic devices such as the frequent negations in the corpus of management meetings: pointing gestures and shifts in gaze direction can be used to counter-balance the fact that negations do not impute the contested point of view, unlike other resources such as attributed reported speech (e.g. “you said that...”). This opens up some promising prospects for pragmatic exploration.

## Transcript conventions<sup>6</sup>

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| / \                | Rising and falling intonations  |
| :                  | Prolongation of a sound   |
| -                  | Abrupt interruption in utterance  |
| (.) (..) (...) (n) | Pauses (1/4, 1/2, 3/4 second; n = seconds)  |
| MAIS               | Emphasis  |
| [YY YYYY]          | Overlapping speech  |
| &                  | Extension of the turn after an overlap  |
| =                  | Latching  |
| (it; eat)          | Speech which is in doubt in the transcript  |
| XX XXX             | Speech which is unclear in the transcript   |
| ((laughs))         | Annotation of non-verbal activity   |
| +---+, *----*      | Delimits gaze direction for each speaker of the extracts taken from the second corpus. The symbols +, ¶ and % refer respectively to JH, IS and SB's gaze. |
| ----->             | The phenomenon continues across the subsequent line   |
| ----->8            | The phenomenon continues across line 8  |
| #1 #im1            | Picture 1   |

## Acknowledgments

The author has been supported in 2014 and 2015 by the Swiss National Science Foundation [P2LAP1\_155110]. The paper benefited from comments by Assimakis Tseronis, Chiara Pollaroli, two anonymous reviewers, and the participants of a panel at IPRA 2015, in particular Jens Kjeldsen who acted as the discussant. The author is most grateful to Keely Kidner and Jay Woodhams for revising his English text.

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<sup>6</sup> Adapted from ICOR, v. 2013 ([http://icar.univ-lyon2.fr/projets/corinte/bandeau\\_droit/convention\\_icor.htm](http://icar.univ-lyon2.fr/projets/corinte/bandeau_droit/convention_icor.htm); last accessed on July 2016), and Mondada (2007).



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