

Newsmarking and beyond: Requests for reconfirmation in German and English conversation

In everyday conversation, participants recurrently check back about what a prior speaker said by asking them to reconfirm their prior statement:

[LoE_VG_01, 21:24-21:28 min]

01 A: =unter den linden bauen sie jetzt_schon_n WEIHNachtsmarkt auf;=ne,
Unter den Linden ((boulevard)) they are already setting up the Christmas market now, you know

02 → B: ECHT,
really

03 A: <<p> ~HM,>

[AT_Cass_02, 01:08:24-01:08:30 h]

01 A: i saw two GALaxies on (-) saturday.

((...))

02 → B: DID_cha,

03 A: ((nods))

In previous research, such requests for reconfirmation (RfRCs) have variably been treated as newsmarks (e.g., Jefferson 1981; Heritage 1984; Local 1996; Maynard 1997, 2003; Kaimaki 2011a, 2011b) or topicalizing responses (e.g., Button & Casey 1984, 1985; see also Schegloff 2007: 155–158), responses to informings (e.g., Imo 2009; Thompson, Fox & Couper-Kuhlen 2015), and displays of surprise (e.g., Svennevig 2004; Wilkinson & Kitzinger 2006; Robinson 2013), as well as repair initiations addressing problems of expectation (e.g., Selting 1996) or acceptability (e.g., Svennevig 2008; Robinson 2013; Benjamin & Walker 2013). Their separate treatment, however, disguises that there is substantial overlap between these ostensibly distinct phenomena, both in terms of turn formats and sequential implications.

Starting from this observation, I set out to provide a comprehensive account of RfRCs from a cross-linguistic perspective. Adopting an interactional-linguistic approach (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 2018), my PhD project aims to answer the following questions: How are RfRCs designed and deployed in ordinary conversation in German and English? And which similarities and differences are there between German and English? Through detailed sequential and multimodal analyses of relevant extracts from video-recordings of German and English face-to-face conversations, my study reveals that different instances of RfRCs fall on a continuum between ‘newsmark-like’ and ‘problem-indicating’ RfRCs which may be of cross-linguistic

relevance. At the same time, the study highlights differences in the formatting and the overall frequency of RfRCs in the two languages under investigation.

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