Special Issue on Instructions in Driving Lessons
Guest Editor: Arnulf Deppermann

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Editorial: Instructions in driving lessons
Arnulf Depermann

Manheim, Germany

Driving lessons count among the most important pedagogical settings in contemporary society. In 2012, 1.5 million practical exams for a driving licence were held in Germany (Spiegel online, 2013), 269,000 in the UK in 2014 (gov.uk, 2015), 140,000 in Switzerland (fasa, 2015). About 30% of the applicants fail the practical exam. In many countries (like Germany, Ireland, Switzerland, some parts of Canada and the US), it is mandatory to take driving lessons in order to be able to apply for a driving licence. Although a large part of the population in contemporary societies thus participates in driving lessons at some point in their lives, there is virtually no research on this pervasive type of social interaction. It is only very recently that linguists have started to publish first studies (Biesz, Levin, & Crommelin, 2017; De Stefani & Cozzi, 2014; Depermann, 2015; Cozzi, 2015). The neglect of driving lessons as a topic of research in language and communication is mirrored by the fact that professional training of driving instructors does not involve training in linguistic and communicative skills concerning, for example, the design of instructions, giving feedback, or explaining the rationale of certain obligatory driving practices. Although they offer a rich field of interesting linguistic, communicative and pedagogical phenomena, driving lessons thus have not been a topic in applied linguistics yet.

This Special Issue of AILA is the first volume ever which is specifically devoted to linguistic and interactional research on driving lessons. It gathers papers which all focus on the ways in which instructions are produced in driving lessons in five different languages (French, Finnish, German, Italian, Swedish). The studies show how the design of instructions in this setting is informed by the specific conditions of driving, which differ importantly from other pedagogical settings. The authors identify strategies which instructors use to deal the specific tasks and contingencies emerging in this type of interaction. Since tasks and patterns of interaction studied in the six articles of this special issue are usually comparable, the articles also offer insights into the language-specificity of Instructional practices in driving lessons.

The articles in this volume all take a multimodal conversation analytic and interactional linguistic approach. Conversation Analysis studies the organization of action in social interaction (Schegloff, 2007). It focuses on the ways in which participants design turns at talk and jointly produce social structures in sequences of initiative and responsive actions. Basic orders of interaction which are studied in Conversation Analysis therefore are turn-construction, turn-taking, and sequence organization (see Sidnell & Silver, 2013). Sequence organization most basically is shaped by adjacency pairs, i.e. first actions (e.g. questions, requests) making a certain type of second actions (e.g. answers, compliant actions) contextually relevant (Schegloff, 2007). Instructions are a kind of first actions and make compliance conditionally relevant. Interactional Linguistics builds on Conversation Analysis, adding an interest in how linguistic resources are used to implement certain actions in turn. Thus the precise design of turn-construction and the ways in which actions are constructed linguistically is in focus. Interactional Linguistics studies how language is tailored to the interactional conditions of its use (e.g. spatial conditions, prior turns) and how it is flexibly used to perform actions according to participants’ situated concerns (Kopple-Kuhlen & Selting, 2008). More recently, researchers in Conversation Analysis and Interactional Linguistics have turned to the study of multimodal interaction (e.g. Depermann, 2013; Mondada, 2016). In addition to the focus on talk and its sequential organization, Multimodal Interaction Analysis widens the scope to include the simultaneity of bodily action, the coordination of talk and other...