

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

NEXUS ANALYSIS MEETS SCALES: AN EXPLORATION OF SITES OF ENGAGEMENT IN VIDEOCHAT INTERVIEWS*

DOROTTYA CSERZŐ

Abstract

This chapter outlines a research project using nexus analysis to examine the scales relevant in a video-mediated interview. I introduce the key concepts of nexus analysis with special attention to the ‘site of engagement’, and argue that this framework can be usefully combined with the concept of scales. The analysis is centred around a single video interview recorded by Sian, during which the interviewee, Tracy, is also cooking her dinner. While Sian is very much focused on the task of the interview, Tracy seems to orient more to the social aspect of the videochat. This is evident not only from her continued involvement with preparing her meal, but also the way she takes Sian on a virtual tour of her kitchen and living room. Tracy’s multitasking poses a challenge for both of them, as it requires her to violate the norms of videochat. Despite this, Sian manages to complete the interview while also attending to their relationship. In my analysis, I show how their different attitudes to the interaction are indexed by their environment, posture, and language. Together, they create a polycentric activity which attends to their two primary concerns as well as their social relationship. I also consider how

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this video relates to other videos and additional materials collected for the project, which addresses the bigger or more abstract scales. I argue that moving from a micro approach to a macro approach not only helps to identify the relevant scales, but can also show how actors move between them.

Keywords: nexus analysis, multimodality, conversation analysis, polyfocal attention, video mediated communication

1. Introduction

The present volume engages with the idea of downscaling culture by focusing on a range of fields of enquiry surrounding intercultural communication. Each chapter presents a different view of culture, and what communication looks like on the borders of specific cultures. This chapter is based on an analysis of materials submitted as coursework; therefore, the most relevant culture is higher education.¹ The other relevant cultures are so small that they can hardly be called cultures at all, and it is more appropriate to talk about different practices. However, as this chapter shows, these practices (such as cooking and talking to a friend) have different and sometimes conflicting priorities and goals. In my mostly descriptive analysis I demonstrate how two people with different goals conduct an encounter which is ultimately successful for both of them. They achieve this by creating a hybrid polycentric interaction attending to both of their concerns. The analysis is carried out using ‘nexus analysis’, which I argue is an approach that allows researchers to engage with the idea of downscaling culture in practice.

First, I map out how nexus analysis and scales can be integrated by focusing on the ‘site of engagement’, which is the place and time where the practices or scales intersect with each other. After discussing the key concepts of this approach, I provide an example of nexus analysis from my own research. I start by outlining my site of engagement: a video-mediated interview recorded for coursework. Next, I provide a multi-modal conversation analysis of four excerpts from a single recorded videochat looking at micro scales, for example the opening sequence and topic management. I build on these excerpts to show how they relate to the entire recording as a whole, jumping up an analytical scale. Finally, I move into a nexus analysis, discussing the bigger scales relevant to the recording in

¹ The coursework was submitted for an undergraduate module on digital language and literacies, in which students were asked to interview each other using videochat software and record these sessions using screen capturing software.

relation to the other sites of engagement (further recorded videochat interviews) and additional materials I have collected for the project. The nexus analysis is presented by answering four key questions for this approach, which highlight the scales relevant for this site of engagement. This serves two purposes: firstly, it demonstrates the compatibility of scales and nexus analysis and secondly, it identifies further directions for research.

1.1 Nexus Analysis and Scales

Nexus analysis is a multi-modal framework that encourages the researcher to approach a given research topic from multiple points of view and to explore connections with other possible areas of enquiry. It is conceptualised as ‘the methodological arm of’ mediated discourse analysis or MDA for short (Scollon and de Saint-Georges 2011, 75). The aim of nexus analysis is to determine what actions, texts, and discourses are important for the participating actors, and this is done by asking a long list of questions elaborated by Jones et al. (2001) and Scollon (2001). The multi-disciplinary nature of this approach is highlighted by the range of methods that can be applied including systemic functional grammar, ethnography of communication, ethnomethodology, conversation analysis (CA), interactional sociolinguistics, new literacy studies, and critical discourse analysis (Norris and Jones 2005a).

At the heart of the analysis is the ‘site of engagement’, which is a “unique historical moment and material space when separate practices [...] come together in real time to form an action” (Scollon and Scollon 2004, 12). This is visualised in Figure 14-1, where the square represents the site of engagement and the cycles represent the different intersecting practices.

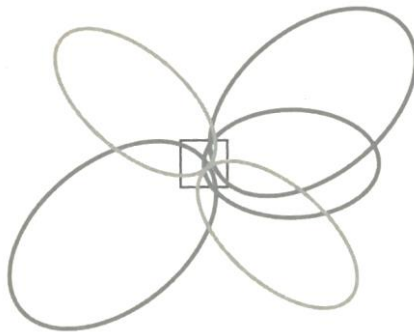


Figure 14-1: Nexus analysis (adapted from Scollon and Scollon 2004, 28)

The cycles in Figure 14-1 are of different sizes, and this is by no means accidental. As this chapter shows, the practices intersecting at a site of engagement operate on different ‘scales’: some practices that make up the action are very small (for example a greeting), but when combined they make up bigger actions (for example chatting to a friend). Therefore, I argue that the scales discussed in this volume correspond to various practices identified in the sites of engagement.

For researchers interested in downscaling culture, the site of engagement is a very useful concept because it functions as the focus point, in other words the starting point from which researchers can embark on analytical up- or downscaling. Downscaling involves the analysis of the lower-level actions that appear in the sites of engagement, for example greeting somebody, or taking a sip of tea (see Section 2). These lower-level actions are building blocks which make up a range of higher-level actions. For instance, the same lower-level actions can be part of a gossip session between two friends as well as a formal interview conducted for coursework. Analytical upscaling involves looking at the intersecting practices that make up the site of engagement, perhaps even ‘following’ these practices to analyse further sites of engagement. In this way, the researcher explores links between the site of engagement and other practices or sites, situating it in a wider context. An example of such an analytical upscaling is presented at the end of this chapter. I use the term ‘analytical re-scaling’ to highlight that this is an action taken by the researcher, as opposed to the re-scaling done by participants during the interaction, which is also discussed.

The integration of scales and nexus analysis is not an entirely new idea. Firstly, the concept of scales is mentioned in an edited volume aiming to introduce nexus analysis (Norris and Jones 2005b). Norris and Jones’ volume seems to be aimed at a very similar audience to ours: we are also speaking to “[scholars] interested in exploring ways of bridging the gap between theory and practice and between a larger macro-sociological perspective and a more delicate analysis of the micro-sociology of everyday life” (Norris and Jones 2005b, 12). Several chapters in Norris and Jones’ collection discuss ‘timescales’ as part of the analysis (see Lemke 2005; Filliettaz 2005; Jones 2005) and McIlvenny and Raudaskoski (2005) analyse how children are ‘scaled down’ or ‘scaled up’ during a transnational adoption process. In the same volume, although he does not use the term ‘scale’, Scollon (2005) analyses how different cycles intersect in one action. He identifies six different cycles: cardiac/respiratory, metabolic, circadian, lunar, solar, and entropic (Scollon 2005, 24) and states that “the higher

[level cycles] constrain (but do not predict or cause) the units of the lower levels” (Scollon 2005, 25).

The compatibility of scales and nexus analysis has also been pointed out in a special issue of the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* discussing multilingualism (see Hult 2010a; Lane 2010; Pietikäinen 2010). Hult (2010b, 2–3) argues the following:

A fundamental objective in the ecology of language policy is to examine relationships among speakers, policies, and social contexts across different dimensions of social organization. The union of nexus analysis (Scollon and Scollon 2004) with the sociolinguistic construct of scale (Blommaert 2007) is put forward as particularly useful for achieving this objective.

However, these publications do not explicitly address how the integration can be achieved in a systematic way, which is one of the aims of the present chapter.

This chapter is a response to Singh’s call (this volume) to analytically downscale the notion of culture. I suggest that nexus analysis is an approach that is very well suited to this purpose, and therefore one way to achieve this in practice. In line with Singh’s suggestions, nexus analysis is a multi-modal framework that encourages the researcher to approach the subject from multiple points of view and to explore connections with other possible areas of enquiry. The transdisciplinary² nature of the approach is conducive to triangulation, and provides a way to bridge the gap between micro (small scale) and macro (large scale) concerns.

1.2 The Site of Engagement

In the present case, the site of engagement is physically located in the room of a student who is recording an interview via videochat and it lasts from the moment the recording software³ is turned on until the moment it is turned off. The recording itself becomes the means through which I, the researcher, gain access to the site of engagement. This recording is one of the 22 videochat (VC) interviews collected as part of my research project on videochat practices. All 22 interviews were recorded as part of a coursework assignment for an undergraduate university module.

² For a discussion of transdisciplinarity, see van Leeuwen (2005).

³ Depending on the operating systems they used, students used either NCH Debut Video Capture (for devices running Windows) or Mac Screen Recorder Studio (for Apple computers).

One of the core principles of nexus analysis is the triangulation of different types of data (Scollon 2001). Therefore, in addition to the videos, I draw on three further types of data. Firstly, students were encouraged to fill out an anonymous questionnaire about their VC habits. The aim of this questionnaire was to collect background information on who they talk to, how often, where they are located during the sessions, which software they use, how they set up the VC sessions, and how long they have been using VC software. Another data type comes from reflective reports students submitted for their coursework alongside the video recordings. The instructions for the reflective reports were to write a 300-word critical evaluation comparing the advantages and challenges of the two digital tools (videochat and instant messaging) they had used. In total, 12 students gave consent for me to analyse their reflections. Lastly, I conducted semi-structured interviews lasting between 20 and 30 minutes on the topic of the coursework assignments and the students' general VC habits with 3 students. The triangulation of these different types of data is discussed in more detail in Section 3.

2. Micro-analysis of a Videochat Interview

In this section, I analyse excerpts from a single recorded videochat interview between Sian and Tracy. Sian, the interviewer, is the one who made the recording using screen capturing software on her laptop during the VC. 'Sian' and 'Tracy' are pseudonyms, as both of them have given consent for me to analyse the recording but asked to remain anonymous in any publications. For this reason, instead of using the original still shots from the videos, I have included tracings which retain the data relevant to the analysis but obscure identifiable details. Throughout this chapter, all relevant tracings will be referred to by their figure number only. They are all located in the appendix in Section 5). The tracings are for illustration only, analysis was carried out based on the original videos.

The first excerpt analysed is 1 minute and 30 seconds long in total, but to make it easier to follow I have divided it into three segments (opening the videochat, tour of the surroundings, and negotiating the terms), each discussed separately. These three excerpts (Excerpt 14-1 to 14-3) follow one another without any omitted turns. Each excerpt is preceded by a summary, and contains a transcript of both verbal and non-verbal happenings as well as references to accompanying images in the appendix. This is followed by an analysis of the interviewee's posture throughout the entire recording and a micro-analysis of a fourth excerpt (Excerpt 14-4) from the middle of the VC.

2.1 Opening the Videochat

At the beginning of the recording, Sian is in her bedroom, getting ready to record a VC interview with her friend, Tracy, about her use of social media. Sian is responding to a missed VC call from Tracy 6 minutes earlier, and she is finishing the last spoonfuls of her dinner. As she initiates the video call (turn 1) she keeps on glancing at the screen so she can put down her food as soon as Tracy responds to her summons. When Tracy greets her (turn 2), she adjusts the windows on her laptop so that she can see both the VC window and her list of questions that she has prepared in a Word document (see Figure 14-4). After greeting Tracy, Sian notices that Tracy is in the kitchen (turn 3), and the location becomes topicalised. Transcription conventions were adapted from Jefferson's transcription conventions (Atkinson and Heritage 2006). The list of the complete transcription conventions is given at the end of this chapter.

Excerpt 14-1: Opening the videochat

	<u>Verbal</u>	<u>Non-verbal</u>
1	Sian	Sian initiates the call
2	Tracy hi	Tracy picks up, looks at the screen while saying hi, then turns to her cooking
3	Sian hello (.) ooh where are you	<i>See Figure 14-3</i>
4	Tracy (here)	still cooking
5	Sian is that your kitchen	
6	Tracy yeah	still cooking
7	Sian ooh ni:ce (.) you look nice (.)	

Sian displays an orientation towards the interview as a focused interaction (Goffman 1966): while she is waiting for Tracy to pick up she keeps glancing up so that she can put down the food as soon as Tracy becomes available, which is exactly what happens. She is also attending to the arrangement of the windows on her screen (for the result see Figure 14-4), which she does not change for the duration of the whole call after it is set up. In short, this section of the video demonstrates Sian's focus on the task at hand (suspending any other parallel tasks for the duration of the interview), and her surprise at Tracy's chosen location. At this point it is unclear whether or not Tracy intends to stay in the kitchen for the duration of the interview.

This opening is very much in line with the general sequence of VC openings: the summons is followed by a pair of greetings. In my previous research (Cserző 2012), I have found that video chat opening sequences are composed of the following elements:

- The caller initiates the VC
- The called accepts the VC and greets the caller
- The caller returns the greeting
- How-are-you (HAY) sequences are exchanged
- The first topic is introduced

The first three elements are very much constant, although in some cases there may be variation in who utters the first greeting. The HAY sequences are sometimes (as in this case) completely omitted, or there may be only one rather than two. Thus, a first topic is any topic that is not a summons, a greeting, or part of a HAY sequence. I classify first topics into two types: either a ‘first talkable’, “a topic that may have warranted the interaction in the first place” (Bolden 2008, 302), or an ‘arising topic’, which are motivated by something on the screen, usually a visual prompt, although it can also be auditory (Cserző 2012). They are mostly other-oriented, but they can also be self-referential and they are commonly found in openings. If there is an arising topic, the first talkable is delayed. In this case, Tracy’s kitchen becomes an arising topic and the first talkable, the interview, is not developed until later.

2.2 Tour of the Surroundings

Just as Sian starts introducing her first question (turn 9, in square brackets), Tracy picks up her laptop and shows her kitchen, with only her shoulder remaining visible in the frame (turn 8). In reaction to this, Sian makes further comments about the kitchen (turns 9 and 11), and is then taken on a tour of the living room (turns 12–18). Through most of the tour, Tracy is outside of the frame except for her shoulder.

In Excerpt 14-2 below, Sian’s focus on the task is once again observable: she starts to introduce the first talkable, the interview task, by posing her first question in turn 9, which is quite early in the VC. That is not to say that it is *too early*, as they have gone through the greetings, which are essential, and they have also discussed an arising topic. However, in attempting to introduce the reason for calling without a HAY sequence, Sian is attending primarily to the task rather than their interpersonal relationship—delaying the start of the interview with further phatic talk would have shown Sian’s orientation towards their relationship rather than the task. Perhaps to mitigate the early introduction of the reason for calling, she is quick to return to phatic talk upon Tracy’s visual cue: it seems that Sian has not seen Tracy’s kitchen before, and Tracy is treating this VC as an opportunity to show it to her. Sian describes the kitchen as “lush” and “huge”, validating

it as a ‘showable’, the visual equivalent of a ‘tellable’ (Sacks 1995), and Tracy downgrades the compliment before continuing the tour of the surroundings.

Excerpt 14-2: Tour of the surroundings

	<u>Verbal</u>	<u>Non-verbal</u>
8	Tracy	[picks up the laptop, showing more of the kitchen behind her]
9	Sian [right let's kick off with some uh] ooh it's a nice kitchen	<i>see Figure 14-4</i>
10	Tracy yeah	only her shoulder is visible
11	Sian lush oh my God it's huge (for two of you)	she wrinkles up her face
12	Tracy not really you know I guess (.) um (.) and this is the living room	her face appears partially as she moves from the kitchen to the living room
13	Sian ni:ce	Sian begins to adjust her hair, she continues this throughout the tour
14	Tracy and got like a little table and stuff	she moves the camera around accompanying her commentary
15	Sian oh (.) cute	still adjusting hair
16	Tracy nah	
17	Sian nice	finishes adjusting her hair and tosses it back
18	Tracy mhm	her face appears again

This tour is quite spontaneous, and has not been pre-negotiated verbally. It could very well have ended with a look around the kitchen, and as it moves to the living room Sian seems less engaged: she starts adjusting her hair, presumably she is attending to her own ‘reflection’ more than to the tour, and her answers become minimal. Possibly in response to this disengagement, Tracy ends the tour here; although it is equally possible that she did not want to show the remaining rooms in the house, or that she wanted to avoid disturbing a housemate. The excerpt ends with Tracy’s face reappearing in the frame, which Sian takes as a cue to introduce the reason for calling a second time at the beginning of Excerpt 14-3.

This tour of the surroundings is one example of a type of action that is common in and exclusive to videochat. In this case, it serves as a preliminary to the main task, although in other cases it might be the main task itself (for example when one of the participants is travelling or has moved to a new place). It highlights the performative nature of space in VC, and that the setting can be used as an interactional resource (Jones 2015). This is done partly through the use of metalanguage (for example turns 12

and 14) and partly by manipulating the frame to direct the attention of the hearer/watcher in a way that is not possible in face-to-face situations.

2.3 Negotiating the Terms

After Tracy positions her face in the frame again (turn 18, Excerpt 14-2), Sian attempts to start the interview for a second time using the discourse marker 'right' (turn 19, Excerpt 14-3).

Excerpt 14-3: Negotiating the terms

	<u>Verbal</u>	<u>Non-verbal</u>
19	Sian right	
20	Tracy I'm gonna make dinner while you're while you're talking to me	she moves back to the kitchen, placing the laptop so that she is within view, but she is attending to her cooking <i>See Figure 14-7</i>
21	Sian that's fine (.) that's cool (.) right (.) so (.) could you: describe to me your (.) um daily internet use (.) so what you do when you wake up	she moves closer to the laptop with one eyebrow raised while asking the question
22	Tracy do I have to talk slowly to you [(so you can type)]	still cooking
23	Sian [no no no] no I'm not writing it down: (.) it's fine (.) just chat [um]	she smiles towards the end of this turn
24	Tracy [are] you gonna record me or some[thing] ((high pitched))	still cooking
25	Sian [yeah] you're being recorded	she raises her eyebrows
26	Tracy (pause) am I ((high pitched))	comes close to the laptop raising her eyebrows
27	Sian Yeah	she raises her eyebrows, mirroring Tracy's expression
28	Tracy how d'you do that ((high pitched))	goes back to cooking
29	Sian uh I've downloaded this software	
30	Tracy oh that's ideal	continues cooking
31	Sian I know it's great	
32	Tracy okay [um]	continues cooking
33	Sian [yeah] so you [what devices]	
34	Tracy [what j-] just on my laptop or [or just in (a sense)]	continues cooking
35	Sian [no no no] all all internet use so like what you do when you wake up go to sleep what [device do you use]	
36	Tracy [okay so] as soon as I wake up (.) I will check facebook	she looks at the screen and laughs at the end of this turn

However, she is interrupted, this time by Tracy stating that she will be cooking during the interview (turn 20). Sian moves on to her first question (turn 21), but Tracy is still not ready to start the interview: she does not know how the answers she will give will be preserved for Sian's coursework (turns 22–24). Tracy is surprised that she is being recorded (see turns 24 and 26), but does not seem to mind (turns 25–32), and finally they can move on to the interview (turn 33 onwards).

One of the key moments in this excerpt is turn 20, when Tracy says “I'm gonna make dinner while you're while you're talking to me”. The first aspect I would like to focus on is Tracy's characterisation of the interaction: in her view, Sian is “talking to her”. She did not say “while you ask me questions” or “while I'm answering your questions” or even “while we chat”, all of which she could have chosen to describe the situation. In fact, these formulations might have been more accurate descriptions of an interview, either by highlighting the question-answer sequences that can be expected in interviews, or evoking a more co-operative and conversation-like interview style where both parties contribute. To say the interviewer “talks to” the interviewee is unusual, and indicates that Tracy is probably expecting another type of interaction, seeing Sian as a friend keeping her company rather than an interviewer. Framing the activity as ‘Sian talking to Tracy’ also legitimises her cooking activity as talking and cooking appear to be more compatible than interviewing and cooking. However, it can also be interpreted as an invitation for Sian to introduce the reason for calling, meaning “I'm going to cook while you tell me why we're having this conversation now”. It seems that Sian interprets the turn in this way, as Sian formulates her first interview question in turn 21. Sian does not problematise the previous turn by questioning it or asking for clarification, although her many hesitations could be indication of a problem with Tracy's declaration. At this point in the interaction Sian is already committed to doing the interview, and accepts the terms rather than rescheduling it. The acceptance is phrased both explicitly with “that's fine (.) that's cool” and implicitly with the formulation of the first interview question.

However, turn 22 reveals a bigger problem: Sian had not explained to Tracy that the VC is recorded, and she does not disclose this until Tracy explicitly asks her in turn 24. Even as Tracy realises that the interview must be recorded, she uses future tense, indicating that she thinks Sian will start recording at some point. Sian discloses that she is already recording the VC, although she uses a passive construction “you're being recorded”, which deflects attention from the agent, herself. This poses an ethical problem, as students were instructed to have the consent forms filled out before the recordings. In this case, Tracy did not know that she was being recorded for

the first minute of this VC. At this point, she has already agreed to the interview, although she could have potentially still changed her mind. However, Tracy seems more intrigued by the technicalities of the recording than concerned with her privacy, which is also signalled by her use of “ideal” in turn 30. Crucially, she might not have scheduled the interview to coincide with her cooking, had she known it would be recorded. It seems that Sian had presumed that Tracy would give retrospective consent based on their relationship, which is not an ethical position I would be comfortable taking. However, Tracy opted not only to allow Sian to use the video for her coursework, but also for me to use it for my research, which indicates that she was comfortable with, even if unprepared for, the recording.

Excerpt 14-3 reveals that during the opening, Sian and Tracy had different conceptions of their co-constructed interaction. Sian is aware of the full requirement of the module for which she is submitting her coursework; she has already been studying social media and interviewing in the university context, she has met the researcher (me), and planned how this interview will fit with the other parts of her coursework. In analytical terms, most of the scales intersecting at her site of engagement relate to higher education, as shown by her focus on the interview task. In contrast, Tracy did not realise that she was on record. Although she is part of the same encounter, her knowledge of the goal of the interaction is very limited. She knows that it is for coursework, but she is neither aware of the details of the task nor how Sian plans to complete it. For her, the dominant scales relate to their relationship, with higher education playing only a peripheral role. If we scale down to the level of turn-taking, as I have done in this section, we can see how these contrasting orientations play out during the conversation. It seems that by the end of Excerpt 14-3, they have negotiated a consensus of the terms of their ongoing interaction: they have attended to their relationship and are now moving on to complete Sian’s interview task.

2.4 Posture Analysis

So far, I have analysed the smallest scales relevant for the site of engagement. Now I scale up and consider the recording as a whole, focusing on the changes in Tracy’s posture. The reason that Tracy’s posture during the VC is so important is that half of the time she is violating the conventions of VC. As shown by Licoppe and Morel (2012; 2014), who have discussed maxims in VC, there is a strong orientation towards displaying your face in the frame during the call. This means that your face should be visible unless you have a reason to show something else (like during a tour of the rooms)

and that participants are held accountable if they do not comply with this maxim.

In this recording, the maxim is relaxed or suspended in order to accommodate the requirements of cooking. Throughout the recording Tracy is chopping up ingredients, and she prepares the food by shaking the pot or putting a tinfoil-wrapped parcel in the oven. When she is focusing on these activities, her face is often not visible in the frame. However, Tracy makes sure that she is facing the screen in the opening shot (see Figure 14-3), and at several points she leans onto the counter and focuses on the laptop (and therefore her friend and the task) before standing up again to attend to the cooking. It may well be that these periods are 'lulls' in the cooking, and that there is nothing for her to do but wait for the ingredients to cook. Nonetheless, by taking up an appropriate position whenever she is not directly attending to her dinner, she indicates that she is aware of the general maxim. Throughout the recording she remains calm, at no point does she start rushing or complain that the food has burnt or overcooked. Therefore, we can assume that even while focusing on the interview, she does not forget about the cooking just as she participates verbally in the interview even when she focuses on cooking her meal.

Table 14-1 below summarises Tracy's posture changes during the videochat indicating the timing of the excerpts in relation to the entire recording. The highlighted rows in Table 14-1 show the four periods when Tracy leans on the counter and backgrounds the cooking. The first happens between 02:21 and 05:05, the second from 06:14 to 07:59, the third from 09:53 to 10:26 and the final one from 10:38 to 11:45. This means that in the VC which lasts for 12 minutes and 29 seconds, Tracy is foregrounding cooking for 6 minutes and 20 seconds and she is foregrounding the VC for 6 minutes and 9 seconds, splitting her time almost equally between the two tasks. Another way to view this is that Tracy jumps between the scales (or the practices) of cooking and being interviewed. For Tracy the VC is embedded within the longer activity of cooking, which has started before the call and will end only after it is over. For Sian, on the other hand, the VC is one in a series of activities that leads to the completion of her coursework, which in turn is embedded within studying for her university degree.

Sian's posture does not change in the same way during the VC: her changes of focus are indexed through her language. In Section 2 I have shown how the topics Sian discusses in the first 1.5 minutes of the recording indicate her orientation to both the interview as a task and the social nature of the video call. For the next 6.5 minutes she is focused on the interview: she asks questions, evaluates Tracy's answers, and probes further when she

deems it necessary. This is not to say that during this time she is not attending to her relationship with Tracy at all, only that the interview seems to be her central focus.

Table 14-1: Posture changes during the videochat

Time (mm:ss)	Action	Relevant image or excerpt
00:11	When Tracy's video comes on, she is looking at the screen and her upper body is in the frame. She is standing, cooking in the kitchen and her laptop is on a counter next to her, angled so that she is in the frame.	Figure 14-3, Excerpt 14-1
00:22	Tracy picks up the laptop for the tour of the kitchen and living room	Figure 14-4, Excerpt 14-2
00:46	Tracy frames her face, then returns to the kitchen	Excerpt 14-3
00:51	Tracy puts the laptop on the counter and goes back to the cooking, the framed image is very similar to the opening one	Excerpt 14-3
02:21	Tracy leans forward, resting on the counter and suspends cooking	set-up similar to Figure 14-6
05:05	Tracy straightens up and attends to the cooking	similar to Figure 14-7
06:08	Tracy adjusts the screen, her head is now outside of the frame when she is standing	Figure 14-5
06:14	Tracy leans forward again	Figure 14-6
07:59	Tracy straightens up	set-up similar to Figure 14-5
08:01	Sian asks about the food	Excerpt 14-4
08:54	Tracy readjusts the screen, so that her head stays in the frame while standing	Figure 14-7
09:53	Tracy leans forward	set-up similar to Figure 14-6
10:26	Tracy straightens up	set-up similar to Figure 14-7
10:38	Tracy leans forward	set-up similar to Figure 14-6
11:45	Tracy straightens up	set-up similar to Figure 14-7
12:40	Sian hangs up	

However, 8 minutes into the interview, just after Tracy stands up to attend to her cooking for the second time during the recording, the following exchange takes place.

Excerpt 14-4: Changing the topic

	<u>Verbal</u>	<u>Non-verbal</u>
1	Tracy if you want like a Halloween costume or something and you could search hashtags or [something]	Tracy is resting her head on her right hand, which is on the counter (<i>see Figure 14-6</i>), she shrugs her shoulders at the end of her turn
2	Sian [yeah] I need to (.) think of a good Halloween costume	
3	Tracy pinterest honestly go on pinterest it's awesome	
4	Sian oh okay (.) that is a [good shout]	
5	Tracy [that's how] that's how I got my like face paint idea for last year	Tracy leans closer to the camera, then straightens up at the end of her turn
6	Sian oh::	Tracy is facing away from the laptop
7	Tracy yes	<i>see Figure 14-7</i>
8	Sian was it (.) what are you making	Tracy shakes the pot with her left hand
9	Tracy really boring (.) salmon with lemon and soy sauce (.) with carrots (fine) beans asparagus and mashed [potatoes]	her head is not visible for most of her turn, but she leans in to deliver the last two words straight to the camera
10	Sian [oh my] God exciting	Tracy straightens up again, her head is out of the frame
11	Tracy yeah::	she leans to look directly at the laptop again
12	Sian (you tell me) [um]	Tracy stands straight again, her head is outside of the frame
13	Tracy [(unintelligible)]	
14	Sian I know (.) so do you use (.) facebook chat a lot	Tracy continues cooking

Sian's introduction of a new topic (turn 8) is partly in reaction to Tracy's change of posture (turn 5), but if that was the only reason she should have brought up the food the first time that Tracy stood up to resume cooking 3 minutes earlier. Excerpt 14-4 shows that they have wandered off topic from the interview and started discussing a topic of personal interest to them both: where to find ideas for Halloween costumes (turns 1–7). This digression from the interview emerged from their discussion of Instagram and the hashtags used on this social networking site, which was relevant to the interview. Although the topic of Halloween costumes is linked to the interview topic by the reference to hashtags, it is only important on the personal scale, and not the interview scale. Indeed, by turn 7 it seems that

they have exhausted the topic of Halloween costumes, and this momentary break from focusing on the interview together with Tracy's change of posture (standing up) and focus seem to prompt Sian to ask about the activity of cooking (turn 8). Tracy answers Sian's question (turn 9), which is followed by an appropriate reaction (turn 10) which disputes Tracy's humble claim that her food is "boring". Then, Sian quickly closes the food topic (turn 12) and places the interview back on the agenda (turn 14). Therefore, it seems that the food-related discussion serves a transitional function: by turning the discussion to the here-and now, Sian can smoothly refocus the encounter on the interview scale rather than the personal one, which had temporarily been dominant. In contrast to her first two attempts to introduce the topic of the interview (see Excerpts 14-2 and 14-3), this time, she is successful.

Yet, why is there no such talk in the other instances where it could be relevant? As mentioned before, the exchange in Excerpt 14-4 takes place the second time Tracy straightens up, moving further from the laptop on the counter and towards the cooking area. In contrast, the first time Tracy stands up from the counter at 05:05 there is no lull in the conversation. For considerations of privacy as well as space I do not provide a transcript of this episode but only the following description. Tracy says that she has deleted anyone she is not real-life friends with from a specific social networking site and they discuss the details of this incident. Tracy seems upset as indexed by the strong language she uses (in reference to why she deleted certain users) as she stands up. Sian asks for further details and they continue to discuss the topic as before the change in Tracy's posture. It would be inappropriate for Sian to comment on the cooking at this point in terms of both the interview and the social-relationship scale. In terms of the interview, Tracy is recounting a relevant story and there is no reason to disrupt this line of talk. In terms of their relationship, it would be rude to interrupt Tracy's story when she is clearly upset and not ready to move to another topic. At the time of the other two posture changes, they are also discussing topics relevant for Sian's coursework and the change of postures goes unmentioned. In this way Sian's (non-)reaction to the changes in Tracy's focus reveals that she is attending to both the interview and the social nature of the interaction.

During the closing of the VC, Sian acknowledges the cooking verbally. She closes the interview with the following turn "right (.) I think that's everything I need (.) thanks very much (.) enjoy your dinner". Considering that Tracy is cooking during the entire interaction (although this is backgrounded for half of it) it is quite remarkable how little Sian discusses it. As expected, it appears in the opening and closing phases, places where

phatic talk is all but unavoidable. However, in the closing the reference to cooking is restricted to a formulaic phrase, and in the opening the only time Sian makes a reference to it is by saying ‘that’s fine’ in turn 21. Talk about the kitchen is more extended, but it is directed at the location rather than the activity. Therefore, there is only one real exchange about Tracy’s cooking and as I have shown it serves a transitional function.

2.5 Polyfocal Attention

We could regard the participants’ attention to the various scales as ‘polyfocal attention’. The term originates from Scollon et al. (1999), who have observed that for the Hong-Kong students participating in their study polyfocal attention is the norm:

very rarely do they direct their attention in a focal, concentrated way to any single text or medium. When they watch television they also listen to music and read or carry on conversations; travelling on the bus [...] they read and listen to music. (Scollon et al. 1999, 35)

As the examples indicate, their study did not focus on computer mediated communication (CMC). However, polyfocality has also been identified as a key characteristic in CMC (Jones et al. 2001), although in contrast to Sian and Tracy’s call, in their case the multiple activities, chatting to multiple people, doing homework, surfing the internet, playing computer games, answering emails, and watching videos (Jones et al. 2001, 9), were happening exclusively on the screen. Jones (2004) argues that focused engagements are replaced by polyfocal attention in CMC, which allows for the display of primary involvement along multiple attention tracks. Jones makes the point that focus is not only cognitive but also social: we ‘pay’ attention to something or we ‘get’ attention from others.

The fact that Sian does not comment on Tracy’s cooking during most of the VC signals her acceptance of the parallel activity. Not only does she give her verbal agreement in the opening phase, but she tolerates Tracy’s absences from the frame as she moves around to accomplish cooking her dinner as well as the times where she is visible but clearly focusing on something else. This results in a very unequal distribution of attention: Sian gives her full attention to Tracy treating the VC as a focused encounter, while Tracy is shifting between foregrounding the VC and cooking her dinner displaying polyfocal attention. Sian has good reason to tolerate Tracy’s lack of focus: this interview is part of her coursework, and thus will contribute to her grade. In contrast, Tracy is more interested in cooking an elaborate meal, as the outcome of the interview will have no impact on her.

Tracy is primarily orienting to the social nature of the interaction: she gives Sian a tour of her surroundings and cooking seems to be a foregrounded activity for her at times. She is happy to do the interview, as long as it does not interfere with her schedule, and it is very likely a favour to her friend. On the other hand, Sian is more focused on the interaction as an interview: her set-up has no distractions (her food is put to the side even though her friend is cooking) and she literally has the interview questions in front of her for the duration of the VC. She tries to start the interview as soon as politeness permits it, although she partakes in phatic talk when initiated by Tracy. Though in this case it seems that there are two competing tasks (cooking and interviewing), other interpretations are possible and indeed the point of polyfocal attention is the integration of multiple activities. It could be argued that in this interaction the cooking contributes to the creation of a more informal and relaxed atmosphere, which makes it easier for Tracy to answer the questions, ultimately benefiting Sian as well. This analysis demonstrates that individual actions operating on smaller analytical scales, such as showing the kitchen or even opening up a window on a computer, are linked to more general goals (or larger scales), such as doing a favour for a friend or completing a module at university. These links are explored further in the following section, where I examine the site of engagement as a whole.

3. Nexus Analysis of the Videochat Interview

In this section, I discuss four questions pertinent to nexus analysis (Scollon 2001) in relation to the analysed video and the further videos collected for the project. I discuss each of the questions in turn before summarising the analysis of the site of engagement. The questions function as tools that help to consider the wider context or larger analytical scales by analysing kinds of data in a systematic way. The full list of questions suggested for nexus analysis is much longer, and it would be impossible to address each one within this chapter (for the full list see Scollon (2001)). However, it is important to triangulate, and so far I have mostly relied on the video recording. Therefore, I have chosen four questions that I feel are key to understanding the site of engagement and allow me to incorporate insights from all the avenues of data collection. This includes 22 video recorded interviews carried out by students, 12 reflective accounts written by the same students as part of their coursework, the answers to the VC habits questionnaire, and three audio recorded interviews I conducted with participating students after the coursework had been handed in.

3.1 What is the Action?

This is the most basic question in nexus analysis, which is not to say that the answer is straightforward. In this case, the action is conducting and recording a VC interview for university coursework assignment. However, this is a very complex action and is made up of several ‘lower level actions’ (see Scollon 2001, 162): using screen capturing software; adjusting or checking settings; logging into the VC software; turning video on/off; opening and closing (mediated) interactions; asking and answering questions; having a conversation with friends; using social media (as this was the topic of the interviews); and interacting with lecturers/seminar tutors (before and after the interview). These are the lower-level actions that are relevant for all the videos, but for Sian and Tracy cooking also becomes relevant. Of course, cooking can also be broken down into lower level actions: choosing a recipe, collecting the ingredients, washing and chopping the ingredients, boiling water, tasting the food, putting the food in the oven, and so on. Not all of these appear in the video, but Sian’s familiarity with the process of cooking is necessary to allow her to integrate it with the main action of the interview. Therefore, in their case, cooking also becomes part of the action.

Across the 22 recordings there are very few instances of parallel activities, which makes Sian’s interview with Tracy all the more remarkable. In Fay’s interview with Hugh his phone buzzes, but he quickly silences it and they continue with the interview smoothly. The only other ‘activity’ going on is in Becca’s interview with Dawn, where Dawn sips something from her mug. The sip is very well timed to coincide with a question from Becca and Dawn answers without any unusual delay, which once again highlights how attention is focused on the task of the interview—on the part of both participants. All three participants who engaged in any kind of visible parallel activity were interviewees, further highlighting the interviewers’ focus on the task.

3.2 What Mediational Means Are Used in This Action?

The most obvious of the mediational means are the devices (laptops, phones, tablets) used by the participants to communicate. In terms of the environment, both participants need either a chair, sofa, or a bed to sit on unless they are willing to stand for the duration of the call, like Tracy does. They also require a table or shelf to prop the device on but they can also hold it in their hand (if it is a phone) or prop it on their lap (for a laptop). The interplay of these features has effects on how participants can move and

what can be captured in the frame. For example, Tracy is able to angle her laptop in different ways (as reflected by Figures 14-5 and 14-7), move away from the mediating device while cooking, but also to pick it up and carry it around during the virtual tour. In contrast, another interviewee holds his phone in his hand while sitting on the couch. In his case, all that is visible throughout the interview is his face (in line with the maxim of videochat) although the picture is not stable because he is unable to hold his hand perfectly still. His device allows for easier portability, but this feature is not exploited in his interview.

However, the definition of ‘mediational means’ is much broader than this, and refers to

any and all material objects in the world which are appropriated for the purposes of taking a social action. This would include, for example, the layout and design of the room as well as the grammatical structure of any utterances made by the social actors. (Scollon 2001, 148)

In line with this definition, I would like to discuss the way the participants were dressed. All of the interviewees are dressed in a way that would be appropriate in public (as far as visible on screen). However, some interviewees seem to be dressed in a more informal way: four young women are wearing pyjamas, and another is wearing a bathrobe. The appearance of the participants, at least in these five cases, indicates that the interviewees had a more formal approach to the interaction than the interviewees. Interviewees were also more likely to sit at their desks rather than their beds and to put the device on a stable surface rather than letting it wobble during the interview. The difference in attitude is not surprising, as the interviewees were the ones being evaluated on this task. In contrast, for the interviewees the VC was a simple favour for a friend. Further mediational means which facilitated completing the coursework include the recording software, the list of questions, and question-answer-evaluation sequences. There were also mediational means that addressed the social aspect of the encounters, for example opening and closing sequences, and relational talk. Due to space restrictions, these means are not discussed in more detail here.

3.3 What Are the Practices Which Intersect to Produce This Site of Engagement?

The most important practices at the site of engagement are interviewing, conducting a VC, social media use, and screen capturing. However, participants also draw on a range of other practices. Their experiences with photography and consuming videos help them decide what should appear in

the camera frame, and they are essentially the editors of their live streaming; as habitual VC users, they utilise the maxim of videochat. This is especially apparent when looking at Tracy's tour of the rooms or the uniformity of the set-up of the opening frames across the videos. There are also a range of relevant practices that are probably more associated with off-line than online environments: having a conversation, drinking tea, (not) answering the phone, working on coursework, and reading (for the interviewers).

3.4 What Histories in Habitus Do These Practices Have?

When practices are repeated often, they become part of the participants' habitus. Scollon (2001, 170) argues that that it is important to examine "the history of practices in the habitus of the participants in social actions", that is, how familiar they are with a certain practice. In this case, interviews were covered in the module, so students became familiar with the genre of interviews even if they were not before. The questionnaire answers indicate that they are all fairly familiar with the medium of VC, they know how it works even if they do not use it very often. Based on what is said in the interviews it is fair to say that they use social media every day. None of the interviewers indicated that they were familiar with screen capturing. It is reasonable to assume that they are all familiar with the further practices discussed in answer to the previous question (photography, watching videos, having a conversation, etc.).

3.5 Summary of the Site of Engagement

To summarise, participants use a wide range of practices to complete the task of recording coursework interviews, some of them more familiar to them than others. These practices can also be conceptualised as scales which intersect at the site of engagement. Figure 14-2 is an incomplete visual representation of this site of engagement from the perspective of the interviewer. It is incomplete because there are many scales which could be added, for example cooking for the interview of Sian and Tracy's as well as 'using social networking sites', which was the topic of all 22 interviews. Nevertheless, Figure 14-2 highlights the key practices or scales that are relevant for all the sites of engagement in the project.

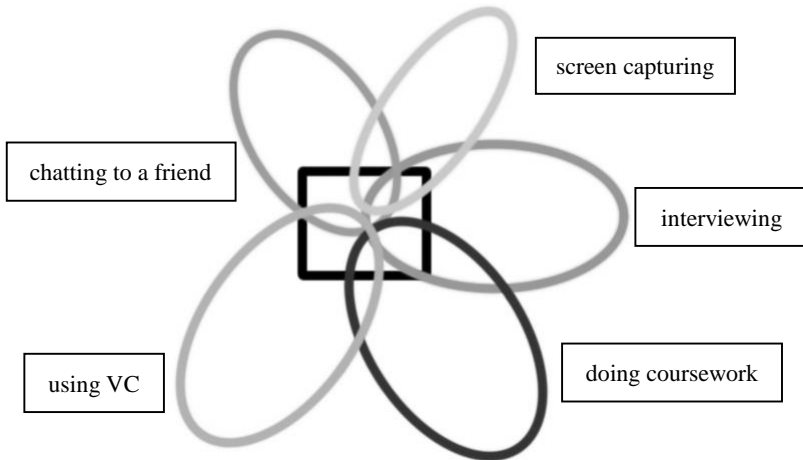


Figure 14-2: Conducting a VC interview for coursework

Comparing the sites of engagement to each other reveals the choices that have been made. I have found that almost all of the participants treated the interview as a focused encounter. Tracy's interview breaks this rule, and together with Sian they need to navigate two centres of normativity, or polycentricity (Blommaert 2010), sometimes making use of polyfocal attention. One centre of focus is depicted in Figure 14-2, and another one revolves around cooking. The practice that most readily connects these two is chatting to a friend, but the others are also successfully integrated despite the sometimes conflicting priorities (for example the maxim of videochat and the physical requirements of cooking). Although all participants had access to similar mediational means, they used them in different ways to index either a formal approach attending primarily to coursework or a more informal one attending more to the pre-existing social relationship between the two participants. Identifying the relevant practices and histories in the participants' habitus indicates directions in which research could be expanded. Future work could focus on a longitudinal study of how experience with VC, screen capturing, or interviewing changes the interaction; or why users use the frame the way they do. Both of these areas of enquiry would require a mixture of data, including recordings of VCs and reflections of the users.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that nexus analysis provides a framework for combining various (micro and macro) analytical scales, which works well in polycentric situations. This is achieved by taking the site of engagement as a starting point from which the researcher can scale up or down by using a range of methodological tools. I have also shown instances when the participants themselves engage in re-scaling, for example when Tracy changes her posture or Sian (re)introduces the interview task. I suggest that the key to integrating scales into nexus analysis is to treat practices as scales, as I have done throughout the chapter. This allows for a powerful way of visualising the site of engagement, as shown in Figure 14-2.

Triangulation is key to nexus analysis, and admittedly the emphasis on the (micro) analysis of the video recordings in this chapter means that the smaller analytical scales have been more fully sketched out than the larger ones. Nonetheless, the micro analysis of the excerpts together with the posture analysis of the videochat as a whole has uncovered how the participants themselves move between the scales. In the beginning, they are focusing on different scales, which leads to a negotiation over the terms of the interaction. Once a consensus is reached, they can begin with the interview task, which becomes peripheral when the conversation drifts into the topic of Halloween costumes. At this point, instead of jumping directly back to the task, which proved unsuccessful twice in the opening, Sian focuses on the here-and-now by asking Tracy about her meal. This then leads smoothly to another aspect of the here-and-now, the reason for calling, which is the interview.

Lastly, I have also touched upon the larger analytical scales by comparing different sites of engagement (the other recorded coursework interviews) and through the reflections of the students (in both written and verbal form). The nexus analysis of videochat, an ambitious goal, is by no means complete at this point. However, it is my hope that I have identified key practices or scales, and that I have been able to demonstrate the compatibility of the concept of scales and nexus analysis.

5. Appendix: Tracings

The tracings included here were made with the intention of highlighting the most relevant aspects visible on the screen. Therefore, in Figure 14-5, Figure 14-6 and Figure 14-7 only Tracy's video feed have been retained. The layout of the video feed in relation to the Word file (and the entire screen) is the same for these Figures as in Figure 14-4.



Figure 14-3: Opening

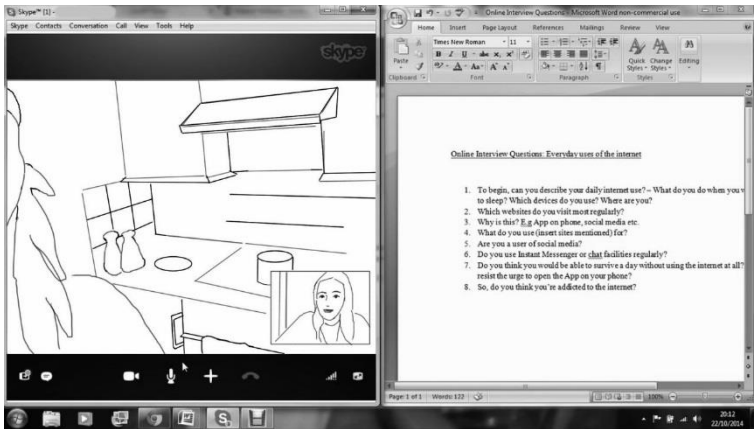


Figure 14-4: Showing the kitchen



Figure 14-5: Focusing on cooking



Figure 14-6: Focusing on the interaction



Figure 14-7: Staying in the frame

Transcription Conventions

[simultaneous or overlapping utterances or actions
=	contiguous utterances
-	halting or abrupt cut-offs
(.)	untimed short pause
(2.0)	pause timed in seconds
((cough))	non-verbal or paralinguistic features
(data)	transcriber uncertainty
ni:ce	lengthening of syllables

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