

XXVI International Congress of the Italian Association of Applied Linguistics (AIItLA)

12-13 February 2026

Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna, Forlì Campus

Conference topics

Communicative Interaction: Relationships, Practices, Perspectives

Communicative interaction is a longstanding and constant research topic in the humanities and social sciences. Recent developments in its conceptualization, in the increasingly rich empirical analyses that underpin it, and in the variety of methods adopted, reflect on the one hand a growing interest in the dynamics of different types of interaction – written and oral, verbal and non-verbal, face-to-face and online – as well as a variety of social and institutional settings, and on the other hand the changes brought about by digital innovations.

This year's AIItLA meeting follows the trail of the XVI International Congress, held ten years ago at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, and the volume that followed (Andorno & Grassi, 2016), while also being in line with some of the most recent AIItLA meetings and volumes (Caruso & Maffia, 2023; Cirillo & Nodari, 2024) which focused, respectively, on unbalanced and multimodal communication. The XXVI AIItLA International Congress, to be held at the University of Bologna, in Forlì, will once again place interaction at the centre of the discussion, with a twofold objective: to keep alive the interest for the already established topics, following their evolution, and to discuss new emerging lines of research. The focus of the Congress is on communicative interaction in relation to 'objects', processes, phenomena (linguistic systems, language mediation and learning, multilingualism, artificial intelligence, etc.), as well as current qualitative and quantitative methods, with the aim of identifying, describing and interpreting interactional features. We welcome proposals that contribute to the current state of research and/or outline future prospects in this field of study; we summarize below the more specific topics to be addressed, in papers that can be theoretical, methodological or applied in nature.

Interaction and the linguistic system

While interaction has long played a central role in some disciplines of linguistics broadly conceived (e.g., conversation analysis, language mediation, or L2 learning; cf. Fele, 2007; Zorzi, 2007; Andorno & Grassi, 2016), in recent years it has also gained a central position in research on language structure. This trend was established through the publication of the first textbook on "Interactional Linguistics" (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting, 2018), the launch of the journal with the same title (edited by Mushin & Pekarek Doehler) and the publication of several important edited volumes (in particular, Selting & Barth-Weingarten, 2024). Interaction has thus become a cross-cutting topic in its own right, encompassing the description and analysis of all levels of linguistic structure (De Stefani & Veronesi, 2020; Calaresu, 2022). We therefore invite papers that adopt an interaction-oriented approach to the study of languages, i.e. that explore the domains of phonology/morphology/syntax/semantics from the perspective of interaction.

Interaction and learning

“The fundamental niche for human communication”, writes Levinson (2019, 112), “is social interaction in a face-to-face context: this is the context in which language is learned, the bulk of usage occurs, and almost certainly the context in which it has evolved”. If this postulate assumes learning to be intrinsically linked to interaction, extensive empirical research highlights how forms of interaction have deep implications for learning and how the quality of these forms influences the quality of learning (see e.g., Nystrand, 1997; Walsh, 2011; Fasulo & Pontecorvo, 2022 [1999]; Gardner, 2019; Caronia, 2021; Depperman & Pekarek-Doehler, 2021). *Learning through interaction* and *learning interaction*, in one’s own or another language, in guided educational or incidental contexts, are the leitmotifs that can guide papers on the observation and analysis of interactional processes. From this perspective, linguistic interaction can also be observed with reference to (multi-)media content (Busch & Pfisterer, 2011), such as self-study tools and/or teaching materials (Barrot, 2021), or with respect to the specificities of interaction in new media and *gaming* activities (Hofstetter & Robles, 2023).

Interaction and multilingualism

A growing number of studies look at pluri/multilingual interaction between people who do not share the same (spoken or signed) language and culture and interact through a wide variety of conceptual tools and practices, including intercomprehension (see, e.g., Bonvino & Garbarino, 2022), English as a *lingua franca* (Jenkins, 2020), translanguaging (García & Li, 2014) and translingualism (Canagarajah, 2013). In this area of study, the characteristics of written and spoken interaction can be explored from a dual perspective: on the one hand, by analyzing plurilingual interactions with reference to the specificities of the context (educational, institutional, professional, family) and/or to plurilingualism as an identity trait of individual speakers; on the other hand, by formulating proposals to promote plurilingualism in education. As for the analysis of multilingual interactions, studies on linguistic and cultural mediation have highlighted how the presence of an interpreter or mediator changes the dynamics of the interaction, which becomes a *pas de trois* (Wadensjö 1998); whoever mediates not only participates in the co-construction of meaning but also takes on (or is assigned) multiple roles that influence the course of the interaction itself (Angelelli, 2004; Baraldi and Gavioli, 2012; Llewellyn-Jones and Lee, 2014). We therefore also welcome papers that shed light on new relevant aspects of mediated interaction, possibly in less-studied contexts.

Interaction and artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence has rapidly spread into various areas of human life, making human-machine interactions increasingly frequent. In educational contexts, for instance, chatbots are increasingly being used as second language tutors or conversational partners (Bibauw et al., 2022; Chiu et al., 2023; Huang et al., 2022). AI has also attracted some attention in relation to the possible impact it might have on language usage and change (Rudnicka, 2023). Against the backdrop of different types of spoken and written interaction, it is therefore also relevant to consider interaction with AI, both for the discursive and linguistic features inherent to the production of automated systems (e.g., syntax, vocabulary, pragmatics of chatbot production) and the production of the human interlocutor (see, e.g., Mindner et al., 2023), as well as for the more typically interactional features (e.g., conversational dominance, negotiation of meaning, feedback). Papers are invited that explore applications of AI-based systems (such as, but not limited to, ChatGPT) in the field of applied linguistics and linguistics more generally.

Interaction and multimodality

Interaction studies have long highlighted that paralinguistic and kinetic elements are closely linked to the verbal ones and contribute to the co-construction of meaning (Poyatos, 1997). A message can sometimes be expressed exclusively using non-verbal signs (a glance, a gesture) and the study

of non-verbal communication is nowadays facilitated and made even more systematic by computer tools and multimodal conversational analysis (Mondada, 2014, 2016, 2019; Eilittä et al., 2023). We therefore welcome detailed analyses of multimodality, based on video data that can shed light on the co- and non-verbal aspects of interaction, continuing to feed into the line of studies started with the XXIII AItLA Congress (Cirillo & Nodari 2024).

Interaction and silence

Studies on communicative interaction in various forms described above have focused on what interlocutors say and on ‘how’ talking comes about in different contexts. But we also communicate with silence (Goodwin, 2004; Mushin & Gardner, 2009), understood not as the mere absence of sound, but as the perceivable absence of speech where it could be uttered (Bilmes, 1994). Papers on the position, function and duration of different types of observable silences in interaction (see Sacks et al., 1974 and Hoey, 2020 on the distinction between pauses, gaps and lapses) and on the professional and ethical implications of non-speech in mono- and multilingual interactions are therefore invited.

Interaction and pathology

Numerous language disorders can impair speakers’ verbal abilities and thus undermine the quality of their communicative interactions in situations of mature language competence (e.g., in the case of aphasia, dementia, or psychopathology), or prevent their full and effective development during ontogeny (e.g., in Specific Language Impairment or in Autism Spectrum Disorders) (APA, 2022; Adornetti, 2018). Proposals exploring interactional competence in clinical populations of developmental, adult and involutional (pre-senile and senile) ages are therefore invited.

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Proposal submission

Proposals should be submitted by **7 July 2025** to the e-mail address congresso@aitla.it, with 'Abstract 2026' in the subject line of the e-mail. This address should be used exclusively for proposals submission; for any other inquiries, please contact us at aitla2026@unibo.it.

Proposals should be between 4,000 and 5,000 characters in length, including spaces (but excluding bibliographical references), and they should indicate the preferred mode of presentation, choosing between:

- Oral presentation (20-minute presentation followed by a 10-minute discussion);
- Poster presentation (5-minute plenary session presentation followed by discussion during the poster session).

The proposals, written following the instructions outlined in the call for papers, should be submitted in two versions: one including the name(s), surname(s) and affiliation(s) of the author(s), and the other fully anonymized. Both documents should be saved in .doc(x) format and named as follows (using underscores (_) instead of spaces):

proposal type_short title_surname(s):

e.g. oral_presentation_English_language_Franca_Bianchi.docx

proposal type_short title_anonymous:

e.g. poster_English_language_anonymous.docx

Proposals will be forwarded to the Scientific Committee and evaluated based on the following criteria: (1) relevance to the Congress theme(s); (2) quality of the research; (3) novelty of findings; (4) suitability for the proposed presentation format.

Each author can submit only one proposal; in the case of multi-author proposals, each author may submit one proposal as the sole author and one proposal as co-author. Members of the Scientific Committee cannot submit proposals.

The Scientific Committee may give priority to poster proposals over oral presentation proposals, and/or ask the authors to change the presentation format of the proposal to have an equal representation of topics or for reasons of space in the programme.

The outcome of the review process will be communicated by **30 September 2025**. Please note that only AItLA members who have paid their membership fee for 2026 will be included in the conference programme.