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Watching television: the dilemma of gaze

This paper describes the gaze behaviour of television viewers talking to each other. It is based on the ATTAC-corpus which consists of transcribed video recordings of Britons watching live football games at home on TV.

In regular everyday conversation, generally people tend to face each other, and gaze is used as a key cue for turn-taking and interactionality. However, telephone calls show that gaze is not a prerequisite for verbal interaction. In this specific setting, the conversationalists face the following dilemma: they can direct their gaze at each other, but only at the cost of not being able to look at the screen.

The data suggest that humour, spatial arrangements, and age influence the gaze behaviour of the viewers. To make humour a binding force, the person joking gazes at the conversational partner waiting for uptake. Furthermore, the closer and the more aligned the viewers are seated, the more effort must be used to look at the other person. This represents an extra strain for the elderly, which they may choose not to take.

The presentation will focus more on the conversational data, whereas the poster will be used to foreground spatial arrangements.