

University of Oulu of Graduate School
Doctoral course
8 Jan 2026

Interaction, communication, and mundane AI: The fundamentals in naturalistic studies of practical action

Instructor

Dr. Jakub Mlynar, HES-SO Valais-Wallis University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland, jakub.mlynar@hevs.ch, <https://www.jakubmlynar.net>

Dates

16-17 April 2026 or 15-16 April 2026

Objectives

This course starts from the premise that human encounters with technologies based on artificial intelligence (AI) have become part of our everyday life. It aims to provide the course participants with a foundational understanding of how human–AI interaction can be studied and investigated as a form of situated, practical action. It invites the participants to examine what makes these interactions recognizable, intelligible, and actionable for the people involved. The course builds on approaches used in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (EM/CA), exploring how they can be used to tackle the above themes.

More specifically, the course pursues the following objectives:

1. Identifying the constitutive features of human–AI interaction

Participants will learn to recognize the interactional practices through which AI systems are treated as communicative partners, and to analyze how these practices differ from those used in human–human encounters. This includes examining how agency, accountability, and categorization are displayed, attributed, or negotiated in technologically mediated settings.

2. Developing analytic and practical skills for engaging with AI in real-life situations

Through hands-on work with naturalistic audiovisual materials, participants will acquire concrete skills for analyzing the sequential, temporal, and embodied organization of human–AI interaction. They will also reflect on their own participation in such encounters, gaining insight into the competencies required to act effectively and intelligibly with and around AI systems.

3. Assessing what is gained and lost in the shift toward AI-mediated action

The course encourages participants to consider the praxeological limits of AI technologies by identifying which human practices, skills, and forms of understanding are transformed,

displaced, or abandoned in AI-mediated activities. Rather than adopting a predetermined critical stance, the course fosters an empirically grounded examination of both the affordances and constraints of AI as a communicative companion.

4. Situating AI within broader questions of autonomy, interdependence, and social organization

By exploring how AI systems participate in – or fail to participate in – interactional procedures such as repair, alignment, and the achievement of intersubjectivity, participants will be able to articulate the broader implications of mundane AI for social coordination, independence, and the organization of everyday life.

Contents

The course revisits foundational themes in naturalistic studies of practical action and practical reasoning, examining how these concepts are being reconfigured in everyday encounters with AI-based technologies. Through a combination of theoretical discussion and empirical analysis, participants will explore how EM/CA can illuminate the interactional organization of human–AI communication.

1. Agency and accountability in Human–AI Interaction

A central theme of the course is the question of agency: how is it attributed, negotiated, and displayed in interactions with technologies such as humanoid robots and large language models? Participants will examine how classic EM/CA concepts – such as accountability, recipient design, and membership categorization – are transformed when one party to the interaction is a non-human agent. Special attention will be given to the ways users treat AI systems as capable, limited, predictable, or opaque, and how these orientations shape the unfolding of practical action.

2. Sequentiality, temporality, and interactional histories

The course will explore how human–AI interaction differs from human–human interaction in its temporal and sequential organization. While human conversation relies on turn-by-turn contingencies and embodied displays of understanding, AI systems often operate through utterance-by-utterance processing or history-sensitive but non-sequential mechanisms. Participants will consider how these differences affect the construction of interactional histories, the management of timing, and the establishment of coherence across turns.

3. Intersubjectivity and the achievement of shared understanding

Building on the procedural conception of intersubjectivity in CA, the course investigates whether and how “shared understanding” can be meaningfully applied to human–AI encounters. Rather than treating intersubjectivity as a cognitive or machinic state, participants will analyze how it is displayed, repaired, or challenged in interaction. This includes examining practices such as repair, clarification, and alignment, and assessing the extent to which AI systems can participate in these practices in ways recognizable to human interactants.

4. Transformations of EM/CA concepts in the age of mundane AI

Throughout the course, participants will reflect on how the increasing presence of AI in everyday life invites a re-examination of foundational EM/CA concepts. The aim is to identify both continuities and discontinuities between human–human and human–AI interaction, and to consider what new practices, competencies, and limitations emerge in technologically mediated encounters. This includes exploring what is gained, what is lost, and what becomes newly visible when AI is treated as a communicative companion.

Programme

Day 1: Theoretical orientations and conceptual discussions

- 9.00-10.30 Welcome opening with coffee/tea followed by Lecture 1 – *“AI as situated action: A praxeology of non-human agents”*
- 10.30-12.00 Practical exercises and discussions based on readings of Suchman’s paper “The uncontroversial ‘thingness’ of AI” (2023) and Ivarsson & Lindwall’s “Suspicious minds: The problem of trust and conversational agents” (2023)
- 12.00-13.00 Lunch
- 13.00-14.00 Lecture 2 – *“Agency, intersubjectivity, and temporality: Key issues for studies of AI-in-interaction”*
- 14.00-14.30 Break
- 14.30-16.00 Practical work and discussions based on a reading of Schegloff’s paper “Repair after next turn: The last structurally provided defense of intersubjectivity in conversation” (1992)

Day 2: Empirical orientations and data sessions

- 9:00-10:00 Review of Day 1, reflections, outlook for Day 2
- 10:00-10:30 Quick presentations of participants’ own empirical work (2-3 minutes per person)
- 10:30-11:00 Break
- 11:00-12:30 Data Session 1: Sequentiality and temporality – 2 participants will bring a data excerpt
- 12:30-13:30 Lunch
- 13:30-15:00 Data Session 2: Categorization and agency – 2 participants will bring a data excerpt
- 15:00-16:00 Final conclusion and discussion

Credits

3–4 ECTS credits

Background

The course is open for a multidisciplinary audience with a broad background and interest in social sciences and humanities. No preliminary knowledge of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis is required. The participants’ own engagement with naturalistic audiovisual materials is also not a prerequisite for the course.

Study methods

The course combines individual preparation with collaborative analytical work. Participants will engage with selected EM and CA readings prior to each session, forming a conceptual foundation for in-class discussions. Close reading and critical reflection on the assigned texts will be essential for understanding the methodological and theoretical issues at stake in naturalistic studies of human–AI interaction.

During the course, students will work with naturalistic audiovisual materials, either provided by the instructor or brought by participants themselves. Through repeated viewings and fine-grained analysis, participants will learn to identify interactional phenomena such as agency ascription, sequential organization, categorization practices, and the accomplishment of intersubjectivity. Peer-based data sessions will serve as a central study method, enabling participants to collaboratively explore empirical materials and develop analytic insights.

Depending on the number of ECTS credits sought, students may be asked to complete additional tasks such as preparing a short analytic memo, producing a transcription excerpt, or writing a reflective commentary connecting course themes to their own doctoral research.

For example,

- Pre-readings, attending the course and activities = 2 ECTS credits
- Presenting data in the workshop = 1 ECTS credit
- Writing a reflective essay or commentary on the course topic = 1 ECTS credit

Teaching methods

The course employs a combination of lectures, guided discussions, practical exercises, and collaborative analysis through data sessions. Short lectures introduce key theoretical concepts and situate them within broader EM/CA traditions, while maintaining a strong orientation toward empirical grounding. These lectures will be interwoven with collective discussions of assigned readings, encouraging participants to interrogate foundational assumptions about agency, intersubjectivity, and the nature of human–AI interaction in real-world settings.

Hands-on analytical work forms a major component of the teaching approach. Participants will engage in practical exercises involving transcription, sequential analysis, and the examination of naturalistic video data. Data sessions – an established EM/CA format – provide a structured environment in which participants jointly examine empirical materials, propose observations, and refine analytic claims through collaborative reasoning and dynamic discussions.

The teaching methods emphasize active participation, peer learning, and the development of analytic sensitivity. The instructor will facilitate discussion, provide conceptual scaffolding, and illustrate EM/CA analytic practices, while encouraging participants to bring their own theoretical interests and empirical materials into the collective inquiry.

Pre-requisites

A finished MA degree and an ongoing PhD study in sociology, anthropology, linguistics, ethnography, philosophy, or any other relevant discipline.

Pre-readings

Ivarsson, J., Lindwall, O. (2023). Suspicious Minds: the Problem of Trust and Conversational Agents. *Computer-Supported Cooperative Work* 32, 545–571.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10606-023-09465-8>

Schegloff, E. A. (1992). Repair After Next Turn: The Last Structurally Provided Defense of Intersubjectivity in Conversation. *American Journal of Sociology*, 97(5), 1295–1345.

<https://doi.org/10.1086/229903>

Suchman, L. (2023). The Uncontroversial 'Thingness' of AI. *Big Data & Society*, 10(2).

<https://doi.org/10.1177/20539517231206794>