Episode 40 – Emotion at Work in overlooked parts of conversation
(AKA Non-lexical Vocalisations)
Chatting with Dr Emily Hofstetter (bio here https://emilyhofstetter.ca/)

Phil: Hello and welcome to the Emotion at Work podcast, where we take a deep dive into the human condition, having conversations that you might not necessarily expect. I'm really excited about today's episode because we are in particular really delving into this idea of conversations and what happens within them. If you're a fan of the show you'll be familiar with the presence of linguistics on this podcast, and we're delving into that discipline again today. I'm doing it because the workplace and work itself revolves around talk and conversation, and therefore what happens in talk and conversation really, really matters. Now those conversations might be in meetings, they might be in one to ones, they might be over coffee or tea in cafes or communal areas within workplaces. All of the time though we're putting together words to communicate a message, but actually we're putting together more than words to communicate a message. I really want to get into some of the detail of all that today. Because our guest is such a specialist with words and non words and sayings and really small bits of talk, I'm very conscious about speaking. I just said 'um' and now like in my head I'm like oh no, I've said um and I can't do that. Anyway so let's welcome to the podcast Doctor Emily Hofstetter. Hello, Emily, how are you?

Emily: Hello, thank you.

Phil: How are you?

Emily: I'm doing very well, thanks very much.

Phil: As per usual then for this podcast we open with an innocuous yet unexpected question. So I have prewarned Emily, that I'm going to ask her a question but she doesn't know what that question is. So my unexpected yet innocuous question for today is, tell me about a walk that you've really enjoyed?

Emily: You've asked the right person about that.

Phil: Oh, really? Okay.

Emily: I love walking, walking is one of my favourite things to do and from my PhD onwards it's become my main form of exercise and I try to build my day around a walk. So everybody with bicycles and is really confused why a lot of the time I'm really happy to just leave my bicycle at home and walk, even though it takes two to three times as long, because I just really like it. I walk and listen to podcasts and then my walk here, I go from town and then I go through a forest, where I take off the podcast and I just listen to the forest for about the 20 minutes that it takes to get through there and birdwatch, and sometimes there's deer and it's fabulous. I do it twice a day everyday and it's so great to watch the forest change and see the leaves change and everything go from really, really loud bird calls in the spring, through to what's now almost silent in the fall. It's really, really fantastic. Just sort every day that's perfect. Then recently we did a hike for eight hours or so in a…

Phil: Eight hours?

Emily: Yeah, it's not that long, we're also not super fit, so it took us probably longer than the recommended, plus we took breaks and had tea because we bring tea everywhere. We could see over the bay of a nearby town and there were lingonberries everywhere that we could just eat as we walked. Yeah, it was great.

Phil: Wow. So where in the world are you then? You painted a wonderful picture so I thought it might be good for the listener to get an idea as to where you are. So Sweden?

Emily: I live in Sweden, in Linkoping specifically and then we took a walk near the neighbouring town of Nykoping, which has this amazing bay because it technically is on the sea, even though it's quite far in land, it has a very deep bay inlet. There's an outcrop of granite stuff with trees on it, lingonberries love to live on rocky soil it seems, so there was lots of those there. I'm probably being very un Swedish here because you're not supposed to tell anybody where the berries are.

Phil: Oh, you're not?

Emily: No. Anyway, it's a public trail, someone's got to know.

Phil: Brilliant. You mentioned that you said for my PhD onwards walking has been your main form of exercise. What made the shift or what was behind that distinction?

Emily: It was a very work based rationale I guess. One, was I didn't have a lot of money and I was trying to pay off debt and things with whatever I could get. So I didn't want to take the bus and I didn't want to spend a lot of money going to a gym, so for better for worse I chose just to walk for as much of my commute as possible. My bike was dreadful and I didn't have the money to get a better one. I called it Cricket because it sounded like one. Anyway I like to walk and that just became a habit, and became a part of my day that I looked forward to rather than suffered through. I started listening to podcasts, became even more enjoyable, the longer you go through the habitual path the more you notice small details. That can be just a really nice way to make life interesting like this. I used to have a berry patch in England that I could go by in the summer that had brambles, but they don't have this year which is a shame.

Phil: I've never had a lingonberry so I wouldn't know what to look for, you've certainly not given it away to me because I wouldn't know what a lingonberry looks like, so I wouldn't be able to pick it and go oh, look there's a lingonberry.

Emily: They look like redcurrants but they taste like cranberries. You can get them at Ikea, you can get lingonberry jam, it's very, very bitter, sour flavour but it's very popular here and it goes well with meat.

Phil: I will add that to my list then. I think one of my favourite walks or most enjoyable walks was, have you heard of a thing called Street Wisdom?

Emily: That sounds familiar but tell me because I'm not sure?

Phil: It's like a semi organised walking event where you get together in a place, normally in a city rather than in the countryside and you arrive for an activity that takes maybe about two, maybe three hours, and it's about walking and walking around the environment, and getting some inspiration from the environment. So you begin with what's called the Tune Up and the one that I'm remembering in particular is one that I did in Sheffield, that was just amazing. It was a wonderful experience because I arrived with a question that I wanted to answer and I did the Tune Up which lasted about an hour, and then you're let off to wander for an hour. So you're given a map in a sealed envelope and you open it after 45 minutes to give you 15 minutes to get to the final destination, where you either tea or coffee or a pint or a gin, whatever drink takes your preference really. It was just one of the most profound walks I ever had, I learnt so much just walking around and thinking about stuff that I needed to think about. I went into it feeling really anxious and unsure, and frustrated, and cross about what was happening in some aspects of my life at the time, I came out of it just feeling a lot calmer afterwards, thinking, yeah, you know what I went in asking a particular question which was, should I get a job or should I keep on running my own business? And then I realised that it was the wrong question to be asking. The question I needed to be asking was, how can I run my own business and be a good husband, and be a good dad? That was the question that I needed to answer because I kept telling myself that getting a job would help, would allow me to be at home more and as part of that walk I thought well actually, no, it's only me that stops me being at home. So what is that I need to do to change the way that I work, so I can be a good husband and a good dad? Yeah, it was great.

Emily: Walking is great for that, it just gives you a lot of space to think and address things however you want to do so. It's hard to get stuck down a spiral thought pattern that's unhappy because there's all these other things that you can focus on and pay attention to if you're not feeling great about it, or you can have a really deep thought process and almost forget everything that is around you because we're so good at walking. Yeah, it's a wonderful activity.

Phil: As a conversation analyst, and we'll unpick a bit more about what that means in a bit, but as a conversation analyst where what you're often doing is listening to or interpreting or recording other people's conversations, does that in part contribute to why you enjoy the solitariness of the walk?

Emily: I never thought about it as something to do with the CA, but, yeah, it could be. I certainly, even though academic work can be very solitary at times when ultimately you do have to just commit to a lot of hours alone with data, as much as you also spend a lot of hours working with data with other people, reading their work and attending presentations, and so forth. There is a lot of time that is solo but it's less solo when you work with recordings of what other people have been talking about. But I often feel like I'm less I'm eavesdropping on a conversation and there's someone else in the room and more as if I'm listening to music. Because data gets in my head with the exact inflection of how people set it and there's also bits of data that just lodge themselves like an earworm into me. So it's as if there's a tune that plays on repeat once I've gotten to know a certain piece of data.

Phil: I like that. I like the linking it to music because there is a musicality to speech in that way.

Emily: Yeah, absolutely. Especially when you're analysing something in such detail you also tend to put it on loop, so you just hear it again and again, and again, it's like rehearsing an instrument almost, you notice more the same way you get better at more details of the fingering or whatever when playing piano, the more times you go over one section.

Phil: What is it about talk that fascinates you then? If that's not too broader question.

Emily: Oh, gosh, there's so many things. So I find it amazing that we can do it at all, I think that when Harvey Sacks was the founder of the field that I'm in and he cautioned at the beginning of his lectures, don't worry about how fast they're speaking and try and not to think well there's no way that they could know that and project that, and do all of that on time, and still deliver their own talking turn on time. He says, don't worry about that because they do it and that's all that matters, we're just here to look at how they do it. But that mystery of how do we do that, there's also neuroscientific work now on how that is possible in the brain which is fantastic. But I just find that skill so fascinating to see deployed again and again and some much creativity and how people can use these skills that we learn completely by accident, maybe not by accident but with very little effort other than socialisation through parenting and friends, and teachers. It's never something that as far as I know that is in any culture directly taught, you only time you get close is maybe when people teach rhetoric, but that tends to do with speeches and not so much when people go back and forth. So I just think it's the most majestic skill that we have as a human species but also one that's so poorly understood.

Phil: You see, when you just said majestic I love that. One of the most majestic skills that we have as human species.

Emily: I've been watching too much Planet Earth probably [Laughs].

Phil: [Laughs] So one of the things I said in my introduction was that talk is about words but it's also about non words as well. That was where we began wasn't it when I contacted you through Twitter to say can I interview you for the podcast, because I think it would be really interesting to get into the really small, do you call them articles of speech?

Emily: Oh, there's been a couple of different terms. Our project calls them non-lexical vocalisations, although that's a bit of a mouthful.

Phil: Non-lexical vocalisations, wonderful. Love that, so we've got majestic and non-lexical vocalisations.

Emily: Sounds or sound objects or sound tokens or just tokens, sometimes particles, although that's a more specific grammatical reference. So even just sounds is fine. We're arguing against the entire field of linguistics that is cheerfully saying well this isn't a word and so I don't care. What counts as a word and not a word is such a grey zone and such a difficult thing to define, that I think a lot of the things we look at anyway in our non word project are words, like whoops. Whoops is in the dictionary so where do you draw the line? So anyway there's a lot of terms but anything that gets the idea across is totally fine.

Phil: Okay, so sounds or what do you call them, something vocalisations?

Emily: Non-lexical vocalisations as opposed to lexical ones which are just words.

Phil: Which are just words. Because one of the things that I learnt, I want to say at quite an early time in my professional life I think, was the intake of breath sound as a signal of I've got something that I want to say. I guess would that form in the non-lexical vocalisation camp where you might be speaking or you might have the floor as I have now, and then I would hear someone else go [takes intake of breath]. Maybe not as accentuated as that because I'm adding emphasis because it's a podcast recording, but when you hear in that intake of breath, so, okay, that person wants to say something. Sometimes I literally stop, I don't know if literally is the right word but I've said it now, sometimes I would stop my utterance and say is there something you want to add? And other times I might finish my utterance and get to a point where it was appropriate to bring that person in and share their thoughts or whatever it is that might be going on as well. I'm conscious that sometimes I get it wrong, sometimes somebody is just breathing but I've heard the breath and thought it was I want to speak and they don't.

Emily: Yeah, absolutely. Interestingly I think very linguistic-y folk within the discipline would probably say that an inbreath doesn't count as a non-lexical vocalisation, because it's not a vocalisation in the sense that it doesn't involve the vocal cords. But also because it's an inbreath, it's ingressive and it's a basically taking in the fuel that is required to do vocalisations. On the other hand I'm not against pretty much anything being, this is just me personally and this is so incredibly not a normal thing in linguistics or any linguistic related field, even maybe CA to say that pretty much anything that we have available to us is communicative and a resource for doing stuff in life. Including sometimes that you can use water that isn't part of your body, so pouring a liquid can be part of the communicative process. Boiling a kettle can be important because it's loud and so you might not be able to talk over it, this is a problem in my house all the time, is that somebody will be sitting on the sofa and the other is near the boiling kettle and says, okay, stop I can't hear you. And to me that isn't really just an environment interfering, it really is part of the social environment and the social actions that we're doing.

But then the breath I guess because it's looked at as sort of fuel is often not treated that way whereas I think it absolutely is and as you say we treat it as meaningful, we treat it as doing action all the time. There's always that going on in meetings or indeed in the data sessions, we're all analysing data when somebody wants to take a turn and say a point, there's an inbreath and that means that someone should probably wrap up what they're saying, even if it comes in a silence someone's about to take a turn. It's a bid to say I'm about to do this does anyone want to not, does anyone else have an objection to me talking now sort of thing, and if you do, you better hurry because I'm about to go.

Phil: Okay, there's a number of things that I want to unpick within that. So we've talked about conversation analysis and then we've abbreviated it to CA.

Emily: Oh, yeah, sorry.

Phil: That's fine, don't worry. So I think we should define what that is then and we can get into more detail about why you might be going against some of the general views around linguistics in

terms of the non-lexical vocalisations and/or just other sounds that maybe occurring in speech as to why that's different from what other researchers might be viewing or thinking or feeling at the moment. But the thing that I have to get out of my head before we move on is, I have very much been guilty of using a kettle to end a conversation that I don't want to have.

Emily: [Laughs].

Phil: As soon you said it I thought, yeah, that's a strategy I've used ideally to end or if not to pause a conversation that I'm not enjoying or don't want to have. I know my wife listens to this podcast now and again, so hopefully she's not listening to this particular bit because then every time I boil the kettle thereafter she's going to go, hang on a minute are you trying to stop a conversation you don't want to have? But I agree with you and the timing of the kettle boiling is vitally important. If I was doing some, not that I record the interactions that we have at home, but when people do these things there can be, not always, but there can be some real meaning behind the timing of when those things are done.

Emily: Absolutely.

Phil: Right, that's out of my head, I can move on now [laughs].

Emily: [Laughs] There's so much about the kettle. In North America kettles take longer to boil so there's a different timing that you have to be aware of when using a kettle in different countries. Which my husband and I often have to be used to because we travel so often between family in North America, as you can tell from my accent I'm from Canada. And then living in Europe and various places and so the different voltage means different contingencies to do with that noise, and we drink a lot of tea so it's a really relevant concern. But anyway, sorry, I'll leave it [Laughs].

Phil: Are you saying then, Emily, that we need to have another podcast episode specially on kettles and their usage and speeds?

Emily: Oh, yeah, I think there should be a whole book on the way tea kettles are involved in interaction.

Phil: [Laughs] Let's start the conversation analysis/CA as we've abbreviated it. Have you got a working definition that you would use for a CA?

Emily: Conversation Analysis is the study of naturalistic human interaction. People use increasingly different terms to talk about different components of that, so whether they're focusing on the body, the voice, whether they're looking at it at a workplace or whether they're looking at it at home. But any time that humans are doing things with each other that involves some kind of communication, I would say the majority look at some kind of interaction that's synchronises at the same time, so a phone call, a face to face interaction or indeed over the internet like we're doing. Or there is also some people who look at internet use, so instant chat, text messaging on phones and even internet forums. But the original use of it was to look at telephone calls and figure out what is the structure behind how regular spontaneous interaction happens? How do people manage to have a conversation with each

other without constantly interrupting and still have a nice time? How do they get their points across to each other? What are they doing and how do they do things, such as invite someone over for dinner or say, no, I'm busy? How does that actually take place and what are the structures involved? You can look at it as what are the rules for interaction but they aren't so much rules in a very strict sense, but in the sense of we know what is expected and when we don't do what's expected we have to figure out some way of making that okay. Also in that sense of rules, figuring what are the rules for interaction?

Phil: What might be a common example that would feature either in your data or more generally in the field that we could share that might bring it to life for people?

Emily: The first thing that people looked at and what is still probably the best example was greetings. People say hello to each other and there's a reciprocal hello back, it happens in basically every single conversation people have and those greetings can take different forms, depending on how well you know the person or the formality expected in a situation, they might look different so they might be how are you versus what's up? Those are all there, they happen across medias, they happen on the telephone, they happen on text messaging to a degree. So if you're starting an instant chat with somebody where it's not like a Facebook Messenger, where it isn't something you've had ongoing, you'll have a greeting. Whereas things where they're constantly ongoing like my WhatsApp list or certain Facebook messages where it's an ongoing I'll send a message and that's it, maybe there won't be a greeting because there's this understanding that it's just an update on where we are. Anyway so they say a greeting and there's one back and that pair of things, those pair turns is the basis on which all of our interactions is organised. And by saying hello back you recognise that we have now established, an interaction has opened and that we are mutual participants in it, and then it everything else flows from there.

Phil: Would that include the addition of the how are you, I'm fine thing? Is that part of the greeting or is that an additional pairing?

Emily: Yeah, I would say it's probably the next expected pair in most conversation openings, so you go from hi, hi, to how are you? Fine, how are you? Fine. And then you say something about why you called or the latest news or something like that. And that's the expected sequence that we see when people are greeting each other for the first time of the day or the first time since they've seen each other and that kind of thing. I guess the reason that's so central is in part because it's really recognisable but we all do this all the time. But also because the fact that there's always two, there's a first and then there's a second, and the way that they interlock with each other, is how all the actions that we know about are essentially structured. An invitation gets a response of some kind whether it's an acceptance or…

Phil: Or rejection.

Emily: A rejection exactly. A request gets fulfilled or denied and offer is accepted or rejected to some degree. These are often not explicit and they can be embodied. So you can offer somebody a cookie by passing over and offering the plate that has the cookies on it just physically to them and they can

put up a hand to say, nah. And there doesn't have to be talking at all but there's still that reciprocal relationship.

Phil: So do things always occur in a pair? For example we're using the question and answer pair at the moment but is there always a pair?

Emily: There is almost always a pair, sometimes…

Phil: Ah, there was a pause and there was 'almost,' so that makes it interesting.

Emily: Yeah. The pair can be split up in various ways. Sometimes I think the stereotypical example of what we call an insert sequence is when I can only give the response when I find out some additional information. So there's a recording of a shop or something and a kid asks for cigarettes. The question, the initial request is, "Can I have a box of these cigarettes?" And the shop owner says, "Are you 21?" And the kids, says, "No". And then the shop owner says, "Then no." That rejection of the request can only happen once something in between has been determined and established. And sometimes we can get certain things that don't get a response and usually that is accountable, which means that somebody is going to indicate in some way that that wasn't expected, the lack of response is unexpected and that it's expected still and something should happen to take care of that. That can be if they're not paying attention for instance, so if you pass over the biscuits and they're just looking out the window, you might have to actually tap them with the plate or say, hey do you want biscuits? You might have to go to verbal means to get their attention and those kinds of additional efforts of just tapping or speaking in that context make accountable the lack of response that's happened so far.

Phil: If I was to think about some interactions that I've had in the workplace then where I've asked my boss for an extension on a deadline for something, I've said I'll get this piece of work to you by Wednesday at three, and then it's nine o'clock Wednesday and I'm looking at my diary and going man I'm just not going to get there. I contact my boss and say, "Is it possible I can get this to you on Friday instead?" And then the response is, "Why does it need to be Friday or what's happening or do you need some help?" So I'm not getting the second pair part as it would be known immediately, I'm having to provided additional information to allow the other, I'm talking to my boss in this example, to have the information that they need to allow them to give me the response to the first part of the pair that I've put across.

Emily: Yeah, exactly. So that would be an example of an insert sequence basically?

Phil: If I was to, as I did recently for a project I was on, there was a conference call that happened every other Friday and it was carnage, in terms of from someone who understands a conversation point of view it was just a mess because there was lots of overtalking and interrupting and we didn't achieve very much, and topics of conversation would change all the time. But what I would often ask so we talk about a topic and then I would summarise it and say right, "So this is what we said, the action is this, who's going to do that action?" And then you have the tumbleweed moment then when there's no response, I wasn't getting the response in some way. Then either ended up with me saying, "Okay well shall we not do it then?" And then say, "Well if nobody's going to take the action we won't do it", to force someone to either go, yes, I'll take it or no, we're not going to do the action. Or it will

be, “Oh that sits with me then?” And then invariably that would be if I say that sits with me then that kind of means I’m not going to do it, but out of politeness I won’t leave the silence hanging anymore, I’ll take the action and then try and farm it off on someone else later or it just wont get done.

Emily: Yeah, and I think it’s not always going to be a direct yes or no and there’s not always going to be a really straightforward response, it can be very, well it would be better if such and such… And that can be a response but it’s just maybe less direct or does additional work such as trying to avoid giving somebody a response that causes them extra work or something like that. There’s lots of ways that it ends up being so much less straightforward than it initially seems, which also makes sense because nothing about what we do looks like it’s straightforward, that’s why it took so long for people…well one of the reasons was technology, there were no recording devices that researchers could afford. But also it looked as if there was nothing systematic about how humans talked in everyday life, because the way that we responded or the way that we talked had so many different variations in the turn design, and what kind of responses we’d give to a question, people can say things directly or indirectly, they could do multiple actions at once, they can use their body, they can use their gaze. All of that adds a huge amount of complexity to the issue but it doesn’t change the fact that ultimately we can find a pattern and a system at work, but it’s hard to see at times because of our creativity and our flexibility in applying those responses.

Phil: So I think then that’s a good start, I’ll give a positive evaluation of a good start to a working definition of what conversation analysis is. Your interest in particular you said it might go against the grain because of your interest in these non-lexical vocalisations/sounds?

Emily: Yeah, I think it goes more against the grain of certain subfields of linguistics. I think in conversation analysis, as a topic, most people just don’t care about defining what’s a word and not a word because they’re aware that people just use what resources are available to them, that’s great and let’s see what they do. A very inductive and open ended approach to finding out what is relevant. Whereas linguistics has a history, at least significant portions of it, has a history of working with written sentences or invented examples that try to get at what is prescriptively correct and incorrect, and thus what is the pattern of language that accounts for those correctness and incorrect grammatical statements. So whether or not something is grammatical or not, whether or not something is a properly formed word or not, and those have frequently been on very rigid contexts and very strict examples of what counts as acceptable or not. What counts as correct grammar and what counts as properly formed words and things.

Phil: Within the broader field of linguistics the focus has been on that but within conversation analysis, there’s more flexibility around whether it’s a word or a non word, it doesn’t really matter actually, what matters is that it’s being used and it has meaning in some way?

Emily: Yeah, it does something, there’s some kind of action.

Phil: Or it does something?

Emily: Yeah, if it does then great but let’s look at it.

Phil: What gets you so passionate about these sounds and non-lexical vocalisations I think, what is it about those that particularly interests or fascinates you?

Emily: I really want to see more about how people coordinate their actions together, especially in contexts where people are doing some kind of physical activity, such as physical labour. I look at rock climbing and there's also boardgames and things, and they're often quite complex tasks and they're always face to face tasks and activities. I'm curious about how people manage them. I think there's still a really big portion of what we know about languages based on less complex environments. There's been a movement over the last 15 years or so to look much more intensively at these situations where we have physical copresence of each other and how do bodies get used and how do objects get used? Because of that we also haven't done a lot yet, we're starting to do that a lot more now in the last few years to look at how the voice combines with the body, and how they are intertwined together. Rather than just the body has a lot of regularity and we can do lots of things with our body as well, which is definitely really fascinating, but then how do we put all this into a bigger hole and look at something a little bit more holistically?

Phil: Because I read your paper because you did a paper with Jessica wasn't it, Jessica Robles on boardgames?

Emily: Yeah.

Phil: Because that was how I first found you as it were because I saw the article and I was like, oh, that looks really interesting, I want to go and read that. The reason that I was really interested in it was because, and it may be that I stretch things too far sometimes, but what you described just now about people coming together to do something, people coming together to play a boardgame or to do rock climbing or whatever that might be, for me there's a big similarity with when people get together in the workplace to achieve things. So whether that be for the conference calls that they have on a weekly or daily basis, the meetings that take place, the project teams that come together. And there's all of this talk that happens in those things and what gets focused on is the actions that come out of it or maybe who speaks the most or who controls the floor in that way. But actually there's so much more that goes on that I think it's just out of people's awareness, it was what behind me wanting to get you onto the podcast and to say well why do these things matter? So that our fair listener then is about to start to think about how do they notice or how do they notice these things more and then think about, not necessarily to analyse them and pick them apart, but just to notice them more and be more aware of how these things are used as part of interaction to do things.

Emily: Yeah, absolutely. I'm doing one right now which is a non-lexical vocalisations where I keep saying 'mm' which is necessary to promote you to continue taking your turn. Without thinking about it I'm able to put those, now I'm going to start thinking about it, not thinking about it, I'm putting them at moments where there's a possibility that maybe I could have jumped in with a turn, but I'm foregoing that, I'm saying, no, I'm with you and I'm not taking a turn, you may and should continue your turn. And those sounds are really important for supporting somebody, telling them about something that's longer than the standard quick, how are you? Those things can happen in quick back and forth succession but when we tell stories or when have meeting agendas to get through and

things, there can be much longer turns and we need to use other tactics to still show attention and show our commitment to that ongoing turn, it hasn't just flagged because it's been so long. Basically because it's abnormal in the sense of what the base system is good at doing, which is back and forth, there are practices that we use to take care of that and to say, okay, no, even though that's the basis and we're working with these extra things to make it work, so just mm and you're going to take a longer turn.

Phil: I swallowed then, I was like oh look there's a swallow there's a signal that I want to take a turn. I guess that's one form, not form, that's one way that the non-lexical vocalisations can be used. You said earlier on that non-lexical vocalisations can be used to do things, the mms and the uh huh and the ah ha, and all of those sorts of things, can be used as ways to signal to the person who's taking their turn, continue, I want you to carry on and you have my consent or permission to do so. How else in research that you've done or more broadly, how else do you find that these non-lexical vocalisations or these sayings are used, what else do people do with them?

Emily: They're really good at portraying something is happening in a way that is spontaneous and genuine. That might sound really abstract. Sally Wiggins is another researcher here at Linkoping University and has a couple of really great papers on how people make sounds during mealtimes.

Phil: Mmm.

Emily: Exactly [laughs]. When your mouth is full for starters you can't talk or you're not supposed to and even if you…

Phil: I was going to say, my daughter…

Emily: She doesn't know that yet, she hasn't accepted that perhaps. We socialise each other not to do that and in part that's also dangerous, if you talk while you're eating you can choke. But you can go mm, mm, mm and things while eating and it can happen the moment you taste the food. You don't have to chew and then say, oh, my gosh that was delicious. There are things that you can do right away and for some reason these non-lexical sounds are very good at doing that, they happen when all sorts of sudden events occur, so when you're in pain it's very common to have a non-lexical vocalisation, like ouch or ooh or something like that. Or in the boardgames, arghhhh. Which are more mental agony. Those tend to occur right after the event is noticed and because of the fact that they don't have to take a specific form perhaps, they can appear more spontaneously and they sound more genuine in a way. It's not exactly clear why but they're treated by other people as being a more genuine indication of pain or joy or whatever, because perhaps they're so embodied, the release of sound is so spontaneous and is so uncontrolled or disorganised, that it must be based on just pure outburst. This is still how people treat it because it's not actually true, we absolutely control when we do them.

Phil: Yeah, I was going to say.

Emily: Such as waiting until the event happens even when you can see it coming a mile away and there's all sorts of fantastic studies that people in doctor's offices who are reporting pain and they will

only make the sound at certain specific moments of being touched or manipulating the limb, even though they may be in actual pain the whole time, from say tennis elbow or a broken arm or whatever. They make the pain at the correct moments during the doctor's examination because that's when they need to portray the pain is relevant, that the doctor is doing something that's causing the pain and therefore we've reached some diagnostic importance about what the doctor is doing and where they're touching and things. If they just made pain sounds the whole time they would not be useful interlocuters for getting that diagnosis done. They're really handy for dealing with those spontaneous explosions of affect and being treated as some kind of affectual indication, even if they might not be literally a barometer or a thermometer or whatever of what we might be experiencing in any given moment. They're still really social and organised into a system and into a structure in order to get social work done, not just as literally a direct link into what our emotions might be at the time.

Phil: When you were describing the examples earlier on and then you talked about being spontaneous and said actually they might not be and I said I was thinking the same thing. There was like a ritual where if one person in particular, and interestingly it wasn't the most senior person in the hierarchy, so it wasn't necessarily the most senior person in the room, but it was the person who had been in the organisation the longest, so they had the longest tenure as it was. That when they spoke, so when they took a turn at talking then, the expected or it appeared to me anyway, the expected thing to do was to do a sagely nod and a ,oh, that's interesting kind of noise. I would depict that as mm. So they're making a point and you need to do the mm, yeah, you're doing the sound that communicates that's a really good point, I hadn't thought of that, well done, for want of a better phrase. It was something that I noticed and I thought was really fascinating because actually I didn't think their utterances were all that profound if I'm honest. But it seemed to be that the expectancy was that when a person made their contribution, the expectation of we need to do a sagely nod and a mm, that's really interesting, a really good point that you've made there.

Emily: Yeah, I kind of wish that person when I did my talks. There's an expectation of how you do them. I have known a professor who shakes their head when listening to people, not all the time but sometimes and I've never asked them whether for sure this is the case, but observing them over a couple of years it appears that shaking the head is an indication of following along and that was interesting. Rather than I completely disagree, that's terrible, I'm going to say something later, but it looks like it's I completely disagree. And so it's really freaky to be the one talking and see them shaking their head at the back of the room and thinking oh god what have I done, this going terribly. You still have to follow the expectation otherwise you can create these confusions potentially.

Phil: I guess is there something about if you break that expectancy, if you don't play along, does that communicate something in the same right as well? You talked earlier on about the pairs and if you don't give the second part of the pair or if there's an expectation for you where you take your mouthful of food to do that, mm, mm, mm, mm, type thing, if you don't do those things are they or could they be signals of somebody's I guess stance towards it?

Emily: I think they're treated that way. So when people have an absent response it's treated as a likely indication of what people call dis-preferred response, which is usually something to do with rejection or criticism or denial or something like that. Or if it's to do with the food that they might not

really like it that much or something like that. Dis-preference is a structural expectation that comes when the normative response isn't coming and as opposed to just being no or something like that, it's a bit more complicated. But, yeah, it can be taken that way, I think it can be treated that way.

Phil: So I guess for the listener then thinking about the interactions that they might be having, whether they be I guess, would you include over email? Because you've got that delay in response, would the conversation analysis look at stuff over email as well?

Emily: Some people do, yeah. They definitely find differences in what occurs and how it occurs but I gather after a first email there's some kind of response typically expected. I definitely wonder when that response relevance ends, I am probably guilty of sending way too many thanks emails after it's pretty clear that the email chain should have closed, and I've just continued, so people probably think I have to have the last word and it's just because I'm really not sure if the conversation has closed yet. Closing can be really tricky and I think it's even trickier over email and instant chat because it's not always evident given that you have this record of the interaction that can be picked up again at any point because talk and the body are completely ethereal, they literally vanish into time and space. And email and instant chat you just have that a list and so it's possible to just send messages whenever you feel like and restart that conversation from where you left off in a way that you can't really do in talk. So, yeah.

Phil: I started asking a question and then I asked a second one instead, I started to ask so for our fair listener then thinking about the interactions that they have, whether they be over email, over the phone, WhatsApp and then I guess primarily I was thinking in those whether it may be meetings or conference call type thing. So what would be the things that you would encourage the listeners to notice or to maybe listen out or look out for?

Emily: One of the things that's challenging for my line of work is it can be very difficult to write non-lexical vocalisations into an email, they're typically not relevant because it's a written medium. I love to write non-lexical sounds into an email but they're treated as very informal and non business like, so that might not always be appropriate. I think one of the things that I have encouraged people in the past to do with emails is if you want a response end with a question and the question that you want them to deal with first, because that's what people will usually do. Maybe you could include best wishes or thanks or whatever, name sign. But getting as close to end of the email before the signature is possible with a question, I think in my anecdotal experience seems to increase response relevance and so you might be more likely to get an answer. But then, yeah, I don't know if there's research on how to end emails specifically and how to know an email has ended? Because I could use that in my life to know that for sure. I think emails are interesting because you have this traceable accountability, so you can always go back and say well we said this before but now we're saying this or hang on I asked this question, you haven't gotten to it, could I reintroduce that? It's easier to do that I think over email.

Phil: And either stuff that's mediated over the phone or in face to face meetings, anything to look out for or notice there?

Emily: Ums and ahs are just so great. I feel really sad when people try to avoid them or say that they have to be cut out because they're really important punctuation markers in speech, and they help us know how the turn taking is occurring and things like that. There's also so many interesting facets of the voice that we can use that are not often talked about, that I've seen in training that have been such as how you can use creaky voice and how you can use high pitch or low pitch or really strained sounding kind of voices? They all have their job in talk and they're really useful, so we can use laugh tokens and things like that, so we can intersperse talk with laughter, like in that. And people tend to do that when dealing with delicate topics put broadly and the same with creaky voice, so people will talk a lot about vocal fry and there's this overlap between vocal fry, which is a constriction in lowering of the vocal sound, especially in females. And it overlaps a lot with creaky voice, it's not quite the same but creaky voice has a really specific set of actions that it can do in talk, such as also punctuating where you are in the turn and it tends to happen towards the trial off with turns, but it can also do delicate talk. So when people recommend against using creaky voice and things like that, all of these prescriptive terms about how we're supposed to sound, sanitising, neutralise the amazing resources that we have at our disposal to do different actions, which is such a shame. I guess being more open to what we might think of as nonstandard talk and seeing what it does rather than a strict adherence to a robot sounding voice.

Phil: What's creaky voice?

Emily: Creaky voice is that cracky sound in the 'errrr' [makes creaky sound] that I've got there, so it sounds like a door creaking a little bit. I speak with a lot of creaky voice so it's almost I'm trying now not to speak with it and to be a little bit clearer, but I speak with a lot of creaky voice. So listening to me prior to what I'm saying right now would probably, I think I did it right now a tiny bit, would be a good indication of non creaky voice sound. Whereas now I'm throwing it in a bit more.

Phil: That's useful, thank you. I wanted to make sure I was clear about what you meant because I wasn't sure if it was something else, but, no, that's good clarification, thank you.

Emily: No worries.

Phil: You know earlier on you mentioned a colleague, I can't remember her name, I should have written it and I forgot, who's done some research into nonverbal lexicalisations in is it dinner, when eating?

Emily: Yeah, these are interactions at mealtimes.

Phil: Interactions at mealtimes. So would you be able to after we've finished just send me over some links then to that and I guess any other areas that I suppose we've talked about today, so if there's any initial Harvey Sacks papers that you think might be useful for people to have a read of, that I could put links in the Show Notes across to them. And/or if there's any other areas that we've discussed that you think if the listener wanted to find out more then one of the things I like to do in the show notes is to put together a bank of resources or references that people can head off to, to find out more if they want?

Emily: Yeah, absolutely, no problem. There's work by Sally Wiggins is the name of the person from before. If people are really keen, it's a very academic book but it's certainly covers a lot of stuff that is very based on emotion, which is how sound tokens such as 'oh' and 'ah' are used to portray certain types of emotion and how they overlap with different phonetic features like the ones that I was just talking about. So that's a really interesting book by Elizabeth Reber and so, yeah, there's lots of things like that.

Phil: Oh, yes, please, I've not heard of that one, I'd like to have that one.

Emily: Affectivity and Interaction.

Phil: Opens his generic online shopping app.

Emily: [Laughs].

Phil: Similarly I would recommend Elizabeth Stokoe but Talk, The Science of Conversation that's good, she deals with a number of different things in there. I particularly like the way she talks about trouble and dealing with trouble. I like her trouble chapters, they're good. Any other recommendations in terms of reading or other people to search out that the listeners might be interested in doing? Wow, it's £80.00 that affectivity interaction.

Emily: Oh, I know, I think it's a John Benjamins' book or something like that, it's nuts. I might check out the local university library is probably the best place.

Phil: I might do that.

Emily: A lot of them have agreements with local communities to let people read in the library and stuff, so that would be the best way. Or email Elizabeth and see if she can pass over articles or something. Hopefully she's not going to be mad at me for saying, I think she'd be delighted to have people interested so I don't think that, but anyway hopefully it's not 200 at once.

Phil: I also now feel guilty because I have now communicated that I was blatantly looking at my online shopping app rather than listening to you and I should have been holding attentive, so I'm sorry about that, that was poor practice on my part.

Emily: I think it's par for the course sometimes with digital interaction, so, yeah. There's certainly lots of stuff in the phone call data about different ways that other activities get interspersed with what people are doing on the phone. So it's really neat. It might be a dreadful self plug but I have a YouTube video that might be helpful on CA.

Phil: Oh, do you? Oh, please.

Emily: [Laughs] So I'll send that one but I'm always really self conscious about plugging that.

Phil: No, plug away. That's absolutely fine, it would be great to have that, that would be really good. So I guess to pull us together and wrap us up then, one of the things I commonly ask guests is are there any myths that you'd like to dispel or any myths that you'd like to put to bed around talk and/or these non-lexical vocalisations, anything that you think would be really important for the listeners to know?

Emily: I talked a little bit about prescriptive language and how it's maybe not the most scientific or the most useful way of approaching language, and I think an example of that applies to the non-lexical sounds. It's people who pretty easily say whack-whack as like a duck imitation that I'm very poor at is not a word. But then if people say quack it is a word and in fact it's a standardised word in English but then other languages they don't say quack, they say other things as they're onomatopoeia standard word to indicate a duck call. And there can be things in between, you can also describe it as a duck quack, which is just a set of words to describe the sound rather than do the sound. And those kind of differences show how arbitrary it is whether something is a legit word or whether it's something that might not be traditionally considered a word but is completely effective, especially if you're better at impersonating ducks than I am, at conveying duck or whatever. And sometimes you really want to do those kinds of things. So if you're in pain you generally don't want to say, oh, this hurts, sounds far less distressed than ow, ow, ow, which is much more urgent. That's something that I look at in the rock climbing activities is people use those grunting sounds and like tennis grunt sounds and things to indicate that they might be about to fall any second now. Anyway there are all these resources and I feel sometimes that the language myth is to say well, no, only certain ones are acceptable and I think it's more a matter of judging your audience and judging your genre. You don't put non-lexical sounds very often into written text, especially not at work but you might do it with friends and you certainly do it in interaction and face to face. So one shouldn't worry if people are using tons of them, they're exciting.

Phil: Fabulous, wonderful, thank you. So one of the things I know I use is I use an asterisk around something, so if I want to say hello, I'll then do asterisk and then write the word waves and then another asterisk or face palm or other things. Who's been talking about emojis and GIFs is that you?

Emily: I rant about it on Twitter plenty but there's a paper by I think it's by Tollins that I can send that talk about GIFs as a form of interaction online.

Phil: Oh, yes, please.

Emily: Yeah, it is a great paper.

Phil: Yeah, I'd love that, that would be really good. Okay I'm going to wrap us up then. Is there anything else then, Emily that you're thinking, feeling or want to say?

Emily: This has just been really lovely. I feel very excited, what an awesome way to start the morning to talk about these sorts of things, it's an amazing opportunity, so thank you.

Phil: Thank you so much for coming on, I've really enjoyed it. It's been fascinating, I feel like we could have gone on for an awful lot longer as well, there were a number of other aspects that we

picked up on along the way that we've left on the wayside. But, no, I've really enjoyed it, it's been wonderful to have you on and thank you so much for giving your time.

Emily: Thanks so much for hosting and being so interested, it's been great