Interactive exhibit text use in a science centre: Why that now?

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Topic

Despite a myriad of research in museum studies on the topic of museum labels (Falk/Dierking 2013), there is hardly any research on *how* exactly groups of visitors interactively use exhibit texts. Therefore, the fundamental question I investigate is how visitors to a Swiss science centre manage the tension between being active participants in a group interaction and reading exhibit texts – an activity which is prototypically solitary in nature. Visitors find diverse, often recurring, solutions to this problem – so-called practices of using exhibit texts. These include reading passages out loud, mumbling during reading to make the process accountable to other participants, or paraphrasing what was read.
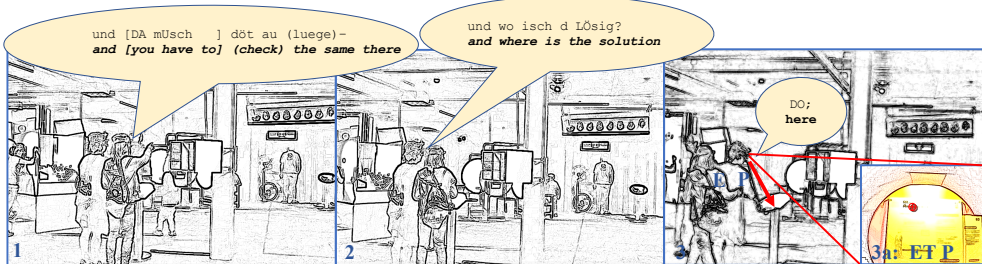
Project and Corpus

- SNSF funded project: 'Interactive discoveries: A video- and eye-tracking based study of knowledge construction in science centres'
- PI: Wolfgang Kesselheim
- >35h of video and eye-tracking recordings of visitor interactions at the Swiss Science Center Technorama (Winterthur)
- Small groups of visitors (2-4 people)
- 111 small groups recorded
- 2 video cameras (+ 2 eye-tracking devices)
- Photographic documentation of exhibits and exhibit texts

Methodology

- Conversation Analysis (Sacks 1992; Sidnell/Stivers (2013) / Multimodal Interaction Analysis (Schmitt 2007)
- Text linguistics (Hausendorf/Kesselheim 2008; Hausendorf et al. 2017)
- Interaction architecture analysis (Hausendorf et al. 2016; Jucker et al. 2018)
- Multimodal analysis (Mondada 2016; Streeck et al. 2011; Heath/Luff 2009)
- Qualitative analyses backed up by collections (Mondada 2005; Mondada 2008)

Why?

What reasons for using exhibit texts become apparent in visitors' interactions around exhibits in a science centre?

und [DA mUsch] döt au (luege)–
and [you have to] (check) the same there

und wo isch d LÖsig?
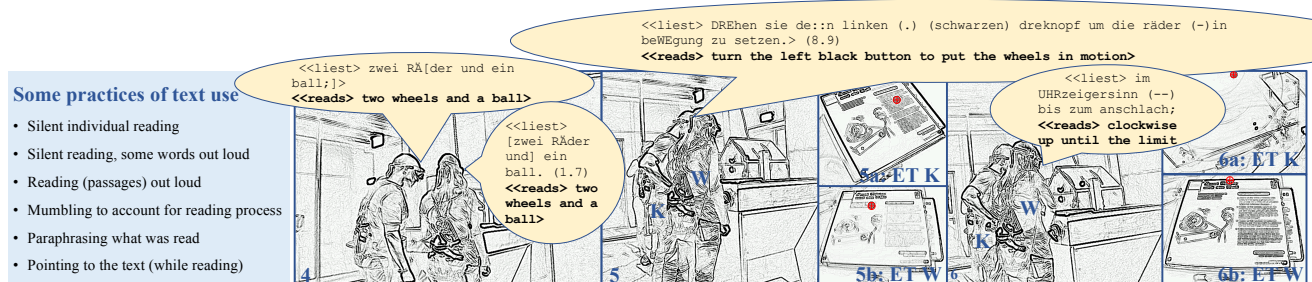*and where is the solution*

DO;
here

Some emic reasons for text use

- Text as a solution
- Text as an instruction
- Text as an explanation (How? Why?)
- Text as an answer to the question: What is this?
- Text as a confirmation

That?

What are the typical practices of exhibit text use in the science centre and when do participants switch between them?
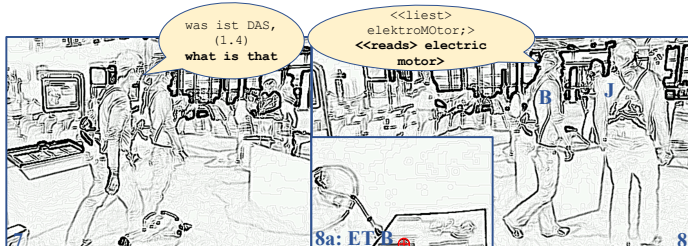
Some practices of text use

- Silent individual reading
- Silent reading, some words out loud
- Reading (passages) out loud
- Mumbling to account for reading process
- Paraphrasing what was read
- Pointing to the text (while reading)

<<liest> zwei RÄ[der und ein ball;]>
<<reads> two wheels and a ball>

<<liest> [zwei RÄder und] ein ball. (1.7)
<<reads> two wheels and a ball>

<<liest> DREhen sie de::n linken (.) (schwarzen) dreknopf um die räder (-)in beWEgung zu setzen.> (8.9)
<<reads> turn the left black button to put the wheels in motion>

<<liest> im UHRzeigersinn (--) bis zum anschlach;
<<reads> clockwise up until the limit

Now?

When within the sequence of using an exhibit do visitors use exhibit texts?

was ist DAS, (1.4)
what is that

<<liest> elektroMOtor;>
<<reads> electric motor>

Typical sequential positions for exhibit text use

- At the beginning (sometimes even while approaching)
  - Title
  - Instructions
- While using the exhibit
  - When not getting any further: instructions
  - Explanations at the back
- Before leaving
  - Explanations at the back

Personal 'styles'

Most groups have a 'style' of using exhibit texts, i.e. they use texts in a similar way and in similar sequential positions at most exhibits (Falk/Dierking 2013).

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