

Political Debate is Gesture War: Function, Form and Prosody of Discourse Structuring Gestures in Argument

Guest Speaker: Elisabeth Wehling, Linguistics Department UC, Berkeley

Gestures that structure discourse interaction - in contrast to gestures that add to narrative semantics - have been documented and their relationship to the same cognitive construals that underlie linguistic usage has been noted (Bavelas et al. 1992, Sweetser 1998, Müller 2004). In their study of gestures that serve interactive discourse functions, Bavelas et al. (1992) distinguish “topic gestures” from “interactive gestures” for the case of *conversational* dialogue.

In this study, I account for what I call “discourse structuring gestures” (DSG, henceforth) for the special case of argumentative dialogue, looking at prototypical form, form frequency and prosody in relation to gestural function. My data are US-American political interviews and footage from recent presidential election debates. It has been observed that gestures in conversation that are not content referential serve to “*help maintain the conversation as a social system*” (Bavelas et al. 1992:469). I show that the function of such gestures in *argument* extends to discourse control over speaker role, topic and content.

As part of my study I extend current notions of gesture analysis and introduce a categorization that distinguishes gestures which implement one gestural effector (*mono-layered* gesture) and gestures that implement multiple gestural effectors simultaneously (*multilayered* gesture), including two subclasses (*co-aligned* and *complementary* gesture), based on form and underlying cognitive construals. The distinctions I propose allow for detailed accounts of gesture semantics as well as gestures’ degrees of illocutionary force.

I further introduced the notion of gestural prosody, propose means to distinguish gestures’ form and prosody in relation to spatial performance and force parameters (Talmy 1988) and argue that gestural prosody stems from underlying cognitive structures in the same way gestural form does.

The analysis of my data shows that DSG in *argument* differ from those that have been observed in *conversation* (Bavelas et al. 1992, Sweetser 1998, Kendon 2004) with respect to form and form-frequency as well as function and performance mode. I suggest that these differences stem from conceptual metaphors and frame inferential structures that underlie shared discourse cognition: Commonalities and differences between DSG in *conversation* and *argument* are grounded in conceptual commonalities and differences between the two domains.

Based on my observations I propose a broad category of gestures that structure discourse interaction: DSG, under which conversational “interactive gestures” and argumentative “discourse control gestures” can be subcategorized.

References

- Bavelas, Janet Beavin, Nicole Chovil, Douglas A. Lavrie and Allan Wade. 1992. Interactive Gestures. *Discourse Processes*, 15/4: 469-489.
- Brentari, Diane. 1998. *A Prosodic Model of Sign Language Phonology*. MIT Press, Cambridge.
- Grady, Joseph. 1997. *Foundations of Meaning: Primary Metaphors and Primary Scenes*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley.
- Johnson, Christopher. 1997. Metaphor vs. conflation in the acquisition of polysemy: the case of *see*. In M.K. Hiraga, C. Sinha and S. Wilcox (eds), *Cultural, Typological and Psychological Perspectives in Cognitive Linguistics*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam.
- Johnson, Mark and George Lakoff. 1980. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kendon, Adam. Gestures as illocutionary and discourse markers in Southern Italian conversation. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 23: 247-279.
- Kendon, Adam. 2004. *Gesture. Visible Action as Utterance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kita, Sotaro. 2003. Interplay of Gaze, Hand, Torso Orientation, and Language in Pointing. *Pointing. Where Language, Culture and Cognition Meet*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Landau, Mark J., Daniel Sullivan, Jeff Greenberg. 2009. Evidence That Self- Relevant Motives and Metaphoric Framing Interact to Influence Political and Social Attitudes. *Psychological Science*, 20: 1421-1427.
- McNeill, David. 1992. *Hand and Mind. What Gestures reveal about Thought*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Müller, Cornelia. 2004. The palm-up-open-hand. A case of a gesture family? In C. Müller & R. Posner (eds.), *The semantics and pragmatics of everyday gestures: 233-256*. Berlin: Weidler Verlag.
- Reddy, Michael. 1979. The Conduit Metaphor. In Andrew Ortony, ed., *Metaphor and Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Searle, John R. 1969. *Speech Acts. An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sweetser, Eve. 1991. *From Etymology to Pragmatics. Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sweetser, Eve. 1998. Regular Metaphoricity in Gesture: Bodily-based Models of Speech Interaction. In: *Actes du 16 Congrès International des Linguistes*, Elsevier.
- Talmy, Leonard. 1988. Force Dynamics in Language and Cognition. *Cognitive Science*, 12: 49-100.
- Uyechi, Linda. 1996. *The geometry of visual phonology*. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Wilkins, David. 2003. Why pointing with the index finger is not a universal (in sociocultural and semiotic terms). *Pointing. Where Language, Culture and Cognition Meet*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Zhong, Chen-Bo, Liljenquist, K. 2006. Washing Away Your Sins: Threatened Morality and Physical Cleansing. *Science*, 313: 1451-1452.
- Zhong, Chen-Bo, Geoffrey J. Leonardelli. 2008. Cold and Lonely: Does Social Exclusion Literally Feel Cold? *Psychological Science*, 19: 838-842.