

Introduction

The study of gesture is a study in contrasts where seemingly disparate symbolic phenomena mix and mingle, furnishing visual representations of meaning that range from the highly iconic to the highly abstract. People have misconceptions about gesture. There is no simpler way to put it. It is nebulous, it is difficult to define, and it is everywhere. Gesture has been a subject of scrutiny for centuries (e.g., De Jorio, 2000/1832; Kendon, 2004, for a review). It has been characterized as transient and fixed, iconic and arbitrary, language and not language. Nowhere are these contrasts more germane than in the study of sign languages where analysts have no choice but to account for how the body (through gesture) becomes a conspicuously communicative medium capable of producing language.

Gesture's relationship to sign language is half the issue. The other side of the linguistic coin is its function in relation to spoken language. Here, too, scholars have struggled to make sense of how the body contributes meaning without being linguistic. It seems intuitive that sign languages are related to gesture and yet different from gestures hearing people use when they speak (Armstrong & Wilcox, 2007). Wrestling through this intuition, accounting for gesture's form and function in sign and speech, has proven much more complicated.

As a hearing person who joined the Deaf community through personal (though not familial) connections and (importantly) American Sign Language (ASL) classes,¹ I have observed the ideological contrast where what it means to be "Deaf" is described, at least partially, in contrast to cultural conceptions of what it means to be "hearing" (cf. Ladd's DEAF-COMMUNITY HEARING-WORLD dichotomy, 2003, p. 41). Hearing

1. I adopt the convention of referring to culturally Deaf people (who use ASL and affiliate with signing Deaf people) with an uppercase "D." Audiological deafness is referred to with a lowercase "d."

novitiates are colloquially positioned as body language amateurs, perhaps in part because the gestures that co-occur with speech do not make sense without sound and not all hearing people are quick to learn sign with native-like fluency. Kemp (1998), describing his experience teaching ASL to hearing students, said:

I find it a sometimes tedious task when I try to teach the use of non-manual signals in my ASL classes. For example, if I mention that they show blank faces while signing, my students will make either exaggerated or nonsynchronized facial movements when signing specific sentence types such as questions, assertions, negations, topic-comment, and so on. (p. 218)

In my own experience working with interpreting students, controlling the manual and nonmanual articulators in creatively depictive ways—such as through constructed action or other types of depiction—proves especially challenging to teach.

And yet, gesture researchers have shown that hearing people systematically use their bodies to communicate incessantly; they gesture from an early age, they acquire more complicated gestures and gesture phrases as they develop language, they gesture even when no one is looking at them (such as on the phone), and they attune their gestures to their addressees depending on context. Stated differently, hearing people *cannot* communicate without gesturing; they are *expert* gesturers, masters of the craft.

The notion that hearing people are incompetent gesturers more likely comes from the operative use of the word *gesture*, which is “gesture as performance” or mime. This particular use of the body, where subjects are constrained from using speech, has the potential to look more like (sign) language (e.g., Goldin-Meadow, McNeill, & Singleton, 1996). When the performative use of gesture is set next to sign language, the two resemble each other, but the “hearing version” indeed looks sloppier. These language-like utterances are newly born; they have not stood the test of time, endured the shifting of positions and filing off of excess movements that refine signs and signed utterances over generations. These forms may resemble sign language, but they are not nearly as complex and sophisticated.

Why belabor the point, then? Perhaps it is sufficient to say that sign language and gesture are not the same. The problem persists because these perceptible differences between co-speech gesture and sign language have

influenced how scholars treat visual imagery in sign languages. It has, in turn, indirectly impacted co-speech gesture scholars' accounts of where sign language fits in their analytical frameworks. As it stands, there are competing views of gesture: one that affiliates it with sign language and one that expels it from sign language. This messy contrast is reflected in contemporary attempts to (re)situate gesture in theoretical accounts of sign language.

Researchers of gesture in spoken and signed languages have made inroads, especially in the last forty years, accounting for the means by which the body creates and expresses meaning. We now know that gesture is part of a communication system (Kendon, 2004), that it co-occurs with speech (McNeill, 1992, 2005), that it has the potential to become more like language when it takes on the full burden of communication (Goldin-Meadow et al., 1996), and that it constitutes at least a limited portion of sign language (Liddell, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2003). And yet, we still cannot fully explain how the gestures hearing and Deaf people use are related, if at all. In this book, I address what I see to be three key theoretical barriers preventing us from fully accounting for gesture's interface with both spoken and signed languages. These barriers have led analysts to either overlook or underestimate gesture's contribution to discourse coherence and interaction. While much of the progress scholars have made in characterizing gesture as it operates in speech has been fruitful, we have reached an impasse where the murkiness of gesture's relationship to language, regardless of modality, must be tackled head-on.

The first theoretical barrier derives from discernible differences between sign language and what is commonly referred to as "co-speech gesture" (McNeill's *gesticulation*). Researchers examining co-speech gesture emphasize its close integration with spoken utterances as one system where both modalities work in tandem to convey different aspects of thought: speech represents the static dimension while gesture represents the dynamic dimension (McNeill, 2005, p. 18). The binary characterization of speech and gesture as two distinct modes discounts the level of gradience spoken utterances exhibit (nonce words and phonation, for example) and the level of systematicity exhibited by gesture (the use of eyebrow raises with Yes/No questions and referential deixis, for example). Scholars interested in multimodal interaction (e.g., Enfield, 2009; Goodwin, 2011; Streeck, 2011) have pointed out the inconsistency in such absolute categories. However, a unified account of gesture's interface

with language that includes sign language has yet to be reached. While the boundaries between speech and gesture are easy to draw in theory, they are difficult to uphold in situated discourse and even more challenging in situated signed discourse.

In this study, the focus is on social events where hearing people are told to use gesture without speech and where Deaf people are told to use it without sign in the context of the gesture-centric game *Guesstures*. Participants were asked to play the game, not in a controlled, laboratory environment, but as part of a game night among four friends. By situating this particular communicative use of the body in two actual interactions, participants in both groups were inclined to transfer expressive burden among articulators as they navigated through speech events—some of which required them not to speak or sign. In the coming chapters, three of these distinct speech events are highlighted. Both Deaf and hearing participants similarly constructed embodied, composite utterances (Enfield, 2009) uniquely suited to their respective addressees and interactive goals.

The second theoretical barrier that prevents the integration of gesture with language comes from the perspective that hearing and Deaf people must necessarily gesture in different ways because of modality. As was already mentioned, it is obvious that co-speech gesture (alone) and sign language are not the same. Researchers (e.g., Emmorey, 1999; Liddell & Metzger, 1998; Schembri, Jones, & Burnam, 2005) characterize this difference largely by relying on a definition of gesture as a range of (primarily) manual forms on a continuum (McNeill, 1992) or set of continua (McNeill, 2005) where sign language is positioned as the exemplar of linguistic systematization of gesture. At first glance, this conceptualization appears entirely apropos. Studies have shown that when hearing people produce gesture without speech, the linguistic potential of communication through the body becomes enhanced (Brentari, Di Renzo, Keane, & Volterra, 2015; Goldin-Meadow, 2005; Goldin-Meadow et al., 1996; Singleton, Goldin-Meadow, & McNeill, 1995). That is, hearing gesturers begin to structure gestures the way Deaf people use signs.

The consequence of viewing gesture and language through this lens, though, is that only a small set of discourse features—mainly depicting constructions, constructed action, and referential use of space (Liddell, 2003)—are eligible instantiations of gesture in sign language. The other ways Deaf people structure their discourses through their bodies (to regulate turns or deictically refer with eye gaze, for instance) or signal

pragmatic moves (like marking stances) are not considered to fall under the gesture domain, although these same behaviors in spoken discourses are attributed to gesture. So, while typologies of gesture have been used as a starting point for reassessing a certain class of signs, in general, the typologies are viewed (and rightly so) as insufficient for fully explaining gesture as it is used in sign language (e.g., Cormier, Quinto-Pozos, Sevcikova, & Schembri, 2012).

Gesture can assume different forms, which is the motivation behind schematizing it on a continuum, but conceiving of it as immune from linguistic treatment in this way prevents us from characterizing the much broader system of embodied discourse. We need to account for gesture's relationship to language, but to successfully make the claim that the two are related, we have to shift how we view and define both *gesture* and *language*. Language is not purely static or digital, and gesture is not purely dynamic or analog. Recent works on multimodal interaction (e.g., Enfield, 2009, 2011; Goodwin, 2007, 2011; Kockelman, 2005) capture this notion by furthering Charles S. Peirce's (1955/1893) theory of semiotics in the analysis of language in interaction. These scholars argue that examining gesture and language in binary terms precludes us from understanding the rich and expansive instantiations gesture takes throughout the course of an interaction. In this study, gesture is assessed as situated in interaction by also incorporating a model of discourse that accounts for the layers of interactional work people conduct in face-to-face encounters (Schiffrin, 1987). By examining gesture as a product of interaction, the array of forms and functions it exhibits in situ can be explained.

The final theoretical barrier to fully accounting for gesture in both spoken and signed languages is the assumption that abstract forms typically associated with gesticulation, whose meanings are not transparent, either are not used by Deaf people or have been incorporated into their linguistic code. For example, Schembri et al. (2005) turn to co-speech gesture theory (McNeill, 1992) as a starting point for analyzing sign language constructions; however, the forms these authors target as gestural are depicting constructions, the most iconic or "mimetic gestures" in sign language (p. 273). The value of co-speech gesture theory to the analysis of sign language is unequivocal. But there has yet to be an assessment of more abstract forms in sign language (gestures that do not depict imagery) akin to co-speech gestures. This has consequences for the way spoken discourse is analyzed as well. The embodied gestures hearing people

use are more easily relegated to paralinguistic status because they emerge in a distinct modality from speech (Kendon, 2008; Sicoli, 2007). Depiction is the first conceptual step toward linking the existence of transient forms (gesture) with conventionalized ones (signs/words). The next step is assessing the range of strategies that spans modalities—accounting for the more entrenched, conventionalized forms and the more transient, unconventional instantiations of sign/speech—which both groups use to structure discourse. Ultimately, I further the examination here of embodied discourses by juxtaposing traditional definitions of gesture with situated instances in spoken and signed interactions.

APPROACH

Deaf people continue to use gestural forms, even in developed sign languages. But the connection between gesture (and the related *gestural, gesture-like*) and sign language is murky. One of the first treatments of gesture-like forms in sign language was Nancy Frishberg's theory of historical change from highly iconic gestures to arbitrary signs. Frishberg's theory that signs not only lose but also abandon iconicity over time only partially explains how iconicity operates in ASL (cf. Taub, 2001). Deaf people become more efficient as they make repeated use of signs, and this efficiency is manifest through a diminished iconicity. Frishberg's theory does not explain how iconicity remains a productive and ubiquitous feature of signed discourse, though. Deaf people are capable of conveying highly abstract forms as part of their discourse, highly iconic depictions (like when performing a narrative or playing a game), and a range in between as they see fit. What is typically perceived as a one-way movement, like an evolution on a continuum, is best explained as a two-way movement, both away from and toward iconicity, based on the demands discourse imposes on signers.

Several decades of comparing spoken and signed languages have produced enough empirical data to prove signed languages are just as systematized as spoken languages (Frishberg, 1975; Klima & Bellugi, 1979; Liddell & Johnson, 1989); they are true, linguistic systems through and through. However, when sign language scholars imported spoken language theories (based on transcribed spoken discourse that excluded gesture) into their preliminary assessments of ASL, they also imported the assumption

that gesture (and its associated feature *iconicity*) was not a part of language (Kendon, 2008). Now that co-speech gesture theory is gaining favor among some scholars' treatments of visual imagery in sign language (e.g., Cormier et al., 2012; Liddell, 2003; Quinto-Pozos & Mehta, 2010; Schembri et al., 2005), there remains an entrenched ideology that positions gesture as paralinguistic, even though a great deal of embodied utterances display systematicity.

The preliminary comparisons between co-speech gesture and sign language constructions mentioned in the previous paragraph have illuminated some important inconsistencies and gaps that can only be addressed by returning to the definition of *gesture* and where it is placed in language. The key to comparing the two is analyzing spoken language as it is almost always produced, which is with gesture. Additionally, by incorporating a semiotic analysis with an understanding of language as embodied, we can begin to explain how these resources work together to create meaning in each modality.

The analysis presented in this book favors the incorporation of meaningful body behaviors as part of language (cf. Sicoli, 2007). By examining these data side-by-side, it becomes clear that analyses of signed language and spoken language have both been limited by their modalities in different ways—ways that ultimately impacted respective representations of how gesture operates within them. Analysts of signed language suffer from the difficulty in parsing the two; and analysts of spoken language suffer from the ease in doing so. In that vein, I further arguments others have already made that language can include a range of forms from the static to the dynamic and that the body is a locus for meaningful units not subordinate to but fully integrated with the speech/sign stream (e.g., Armstrong & Wilcox, 2007; Goodwin, 2007; Kendon, 2008; Sicoli, 2007; Yerian, 2000). In the end, I reach the conclusion that spoken language is best described as a verbal-visual-gestural language just as signed language is described as a visual-gestural language.

ASPECTS OF GESTURE IN THE CONTEXT OF PLAYING A GAME

Gesture in the study of spoken language occupies a tenuous place; the different modalities present obstacles for those linguists who have long been married to the spoken form. In signed contexts, the reverse is true:

the modality that carries the primary burden for communication is the same channel through which gesture is executed. In a very real sense, defining what gesture *is* for the purposes of linguistic analysis has led to the practice of segmenting gestural forms into artificial categories to which situated language use does not necessarily conform. This study brings to the fore the integrated moves participants produce through their bodies and challenges assumptions that position spoken and signed languages in diametric opposition. I depart from focusing on one manual type as a sort of exemplar of gesture in sign and instead adopt Enfield's call for starting with a unit of analysis called the *composite utterance*, which is defined as:

a whole utterance, a complete unit of social action which always has multiple components, which is always embedded in a sequential context (simultaneously an effect of something prior and a cause of something next), and whose interpretation always draws on both conventional and non-conventional signs, joined indexically as wholes. (2009, p. 223)

Composite utterances, multimodally expressed in situated contexts, are the substance of the analysis presented here. I integrate the notion that gesture is “too coarse” a term (Enfield, 2011, p. 62) to describe the variety of ways people create meaning with the understanding of social interaction as “a vociferous process, always hungry for stuff out of which signs, symbols, and scenic arrangements can be made” (Streeck, 2011, p. 67). For this text, any meaningful use of the body, including all visible articulators—eyes, eyebrows, torso, and even the legs and feet²—are examined as “sources of composite meaning” (Enfield, 2009, p. 15). Interactants shift through these articulators depending on both local and global interactional demands (cf. Goodwin, 2000, 2007). Much as spoken words weave in and out of a discourse, sometimes dropping off, sometimes continuing for strings at a time, gesture, too, is woven into the same fabric. When analyzed from a Peircean semiotic perspective, gesture, speech, and sign can be accounted for as products of interaction, each representing an array of meaning-making tools that both hearing and Deaf people manipulate to construct discourses and signal connections to their environments and each other. In sum, rather than looking for *gesture* and then describing

2. Although I do not focus on prosodic features, these should be considered, too.

what it does, these data are approached by identifying moves of the articulators for what they contribute and what they accomplish as a layer (or layers) of interactional meaning.

The benefit of comparing ASL to spoken English in this book is that sign language pushes the analyst to reconsider the linguistic status ascribed to meaningful, nonverbal behaviors that emerge when hearing people engage in face-to-face interaction. Stated differently, when we juxtapose the embodied moves hearing people make during communication with sign language, it is hard to deny that gestures are also a part of the structure of spoken language. The comparison of ASL and English here is not simply an exercise in finding gesture cognates in each modality. Rather, bringing the two together illuminates similarities among certain phenomena (like deictic eye gaze and interactive gestures) that are easily overlooked when we only examine one language. Levinson (2006) calls for a similar exercise in search of universal underpinnings of a human *interaction engine*. He says the search for universals is not to produce “cross-cultural uniformity but, rather, [to provide] the building blocks for cultural diversity in social interaction” (p. 62). To make this claim, the view of gesture (and symbolic phenomena in general) must be reframed to include the means by which participants make sense of gesture, how a physical move can become a sign (in the Peircean sense) and how that sign can transform semiotic dimensions within a single speech event.

Just as language is contextualized, gesture is sensitive to different types of interactions (cf. Goodwin, 2011). Task-oriented exchanges, like building a house or playing a game, trigger different instantiations of gesture than interactions at a funeral or a high school reunion. What remains consistent across communicative events is that people construct utterances through their bodies. In this study, the communicative event is a game night. Game nights are a typical social gathering in the United States. There is a large market for games oriented to adults that typically involve play with language in some form—such as Scrabble, Trivial Pursuit, Outburst, Gibberish, and Charades—as opposed to archetypical child-oriented board games. Game night gatherings are known to include food and drink, to be casual in nature, and to facilitate connections among participants while introducing the element of competition. The competition is usually viewed as less important than having fun. However, a great deal about interaction can be learned by examining how people orient to each other and to the games they play.

Guesstures was chosen for this study for a few reasons, the most obvious being that it required participants to communicate with their bodies without using conventionalized codes, thus creating relatively controlled data sets for comparison between hearing and Deaf groups. It allowed the examination of how the Deaf participants organically determined a boundary (or boundaries) between their perceptions of gesture and sign. Finally, the timed element of the game also introduced the pressure on participants to expeditiously produce several gestured clues, as opposed to performing one clue, as is the case in Charades.

Theoretically, both language groups had access to similar conceptual resources to execute these clues. In other words, the clues were (generally) culturally salient for both hearing and Deaf participants. The gestural choices each group made in performing these clues, however, were informed by the ways they ordinarily use their bodies to communicate (Bourdieu's *habitus*, 1990). Acknowledging the differences between the two groups is unavoidable in this sense: Deaf people more consciously make intentional use of their bodies when interacting, whereas hearing people typically have little awareness that they are using their bodies in meaningful ways. This revealed the most striking contrast between the groups when presented with a task that foregrounded the performance of gesture without the aid of the respective conventionalized codes. For the Deaf people, the task was not at all far from what they do every day. For the hearing people, though, the shift from the subconscious to the conscious use of the body was a leap.

Recent analyses of gesture in communication have shown it to be more integral to understanding language than previously argued. What is yet to be seen are studies that examine gesture in sign when it is highly abstract or, in semiotic terms, as *symbols* (Peirce, 1955). In the following chapters, we will see how hearing and Deaf people intentionally gesture as part of a game. They interact with each other using spoken language or signed language. The gestural modality takes on full communicative burden, but the pressures to interact and engage persist, leading participants in both groups to create composite utterances that include symbolic, indexical, and iconic forms often in the same utterance. In this book, these ideas are unpacked, and we examine gesture not just for its iconic, imagistic qualities but also as an interactive resource in spoken and signed discourse. The data show that the shift from gesture to sign, traditionally conceived of as having occurred in sign language *once* over a long period of time,

in fact, occurs multiple times in myriad ways based on interactional demands. Previous accounts that pinpointed iconicity as the root of the gesture problem in sign language are reexamined in this book to incorporate a view of language that starts with utterance-level phenomena situated in interaction (cf. Enfield, 2009; Goodwin, 2011; Streeck, 2011). The goal is to present a unified analysis of embodied discourse that incorporates both spoken and signed languages and more clearly captures gesture's connection to language as a whole. By reintegrating gesture in the sphere of language, it is hoped that the reader will be convinced of the importance, if not the mandate, of examining speech and gesture as two expressions of language.