

Enactment in contrasting stance acts: a multimodal corpus-based approach

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Enactment is an important vehicle to express a stance in interaction. Multimodal enactments and depictions (Clark 2016), “used by signers and speakers to ‘show’ meaning rather than describe it” (Ferrara & Hodge 2018: 5; see also Cormier, Smith & Sevcikova-Sehyr 2015) are well-suited to express stance, as they allow, among others, for a simultaneous display of both the stance object and an implicit evaluation thereof (Niemelä 2010). However, the question of how such layered stance acts are sequentially organized in interaction remains largely unexplored.

We tackle this question by investigating enactments that are embedded in sequences of contrasting stances, which contain both a positive and negative stance regarding a similar referent. These allow us to scrutinize how stance-taking and enactment are connected, based on their polarity. Specifically, we zoom in on the delineation of both the polarity (i.e. the switch from a positive to a negative stance and vice versa) and the delineation of the enactment (i.e. the switch from enactment to the base layer of interaction (Clark 1996) and vice versa).

Furthermore, we compare the multimodal realization of these cases in three different settings: (1) narrations, taken from the corpus VGT (Flemish Sign Language) (Van Herreweghe et al. 2015), in which participants frequently express a stance on the stories they share with each other and may use enactment to report a stance they distance themselves from; (2) Orchestra rehearsals (Schrooten & Feyaerts 2020), where conductors frequently offer contrastive instructions, expressing both a desired and undesired performance, juxtaposed and in spoken as well as enacted format; (3) Spontaneous face-to-face interaction (de Vries, Oben & Brône), where stance-acts can function as a starting point for joint fantasies, including enactments, that present a playful layered comment on the stance at hand.

This specific constellation of corpora allows us to disentangle the delineation of stance in different communicative settings (instructional, narrative, humorous) as well as languages in different modalities/communities (VGT and Dutch). From each of these corpora, 10 sequences will be selected for a microanalysis using a unified annotation scheme in ELAN (Wittenburg et al. 2006) to ensure comparability. In our analysis, we will pay close attention to body orientation, gaze behavior, facial expressions, manual gesture, and for the spoken data, prosody (pitch range and voice quality).

First explorative analyses show that in the instructional setting of orchestra rehearsals, the distinction between positive and negative stances is more clearly delineated given the didactic goal, whereas in playful interaction among students ambiguity is preferred, resulting in implicit contrasts. Similarly, during narratives signers quickly shift back and forth between different degrees of enactment and simultaneously present information from different viewpoints. As a result, we could expect remains of the negative assessment to be present during the positive enactment and vice versa.

In sum, in this contribution we aim to map out different types of stance contrast in enactment, including their verbal and visual framing, in different interactional settings as well as languages.

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