Stance-taking mouth actions in Quebec Sign Language (LSQ)

Daz (Darren) Saunders
Université du Québec à Montréal

Keywords: sign language, stance, mouth actions, perspective

Subjectivity has been identified as the phenomenon where a person expresses their stance within a spoken discourse (Benveniste, 1966; Lyons, 1977). With a stance, the stance-taker's evaluation of an object or a situation is relayed, without the need of an explicit explanation, to the interlocutor within a social public act (Du Bois, 2007). Stance-taking occurs when the speaker evaluates an object (or notion) and positions himself on a scale (epistemic, affective or appreciation) in relation to this. Furthermore, he communicates this stance with the interlocutor through the act of alignment, coordinating and modeling the minds of interlocutors through socio-communicative acts (Feyaerts, 2013, 212-214). Stance-taking has been discussed for signed languages, notably for ASL, through the use of signed modal verbs, emphasis and facial articulators (Janzen et al., 2011). Mouth actions are identified as having various functions within signed discourse: morphological, enacting (where the signer enacts the character's mouth), lexical and pragmatic (Crasborn et al., 2008; Dubuisson et al., 1999).

In this study we are interested in identifying stance-taking mouth actions within Quebec Sign Language (LSQ) and how these are manifested within a signed discourse where a signer can present his stance during the discourse. The dataset for this study consists of 12 LSQ discourses produced by three Deaf LSQ signers as part of elicitation tasks based on four video stimuli of non-verbal events derived from 2 different scenarios. For each scenario two different videos are shown based on two different modes, descriptive and narrative; the former includes slow and menial tasks, and the latter more expressive and lively actions produced by actors. These discourses, providing 89 minutes of material, are analyzed with the following variables: forms of mouth actions, type of stance presented, and presence or absence of the participant's point of view (where the signer assumes the character's perspective within the discourse).

In this dataset, 34 stance-taking mouth actions were identified having two distinct types on an affective scale: doubtful and humorous. Only 6 doubtful stance-taking mouth actions were identified and the form for all tokens was that of downturned lips. 28 humorous stance-taking mouth actions were identified, with the following forms: lightly opened lips allowing air to blow through, pursed lips, raised upper lip, open-mouthed, stretched lips and downturned lips. We note that the act of smiling, when present, is not necessarily restricted to the lips, but can also be expressed through raised cheeks accompanied by slightly squinted eyes. In fact, this form is present for all humorous stance-taking mouth actions and absent for all doubtful mouth actions. Furthermore, of the 34 identified stance-taking mouth actions, 33 were produced during instances of enactment (the assumption of the characters' perspective during signing). This raises the interesting observation that a signer can narrate an event from the character's perspective, thus assuming the attitude and actions of this character, while simultaneously producing a stance-taking mouth action to inform the interlocutor of their own position in relation to the signed and enacted event in LSQ.

Benveniste, É. 1966. *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Vol. 1). Gallimard.
Crasborn, O., van der Kooij, E., Waters, D., Woll, B., & Mesch, J. 2008. Frequency distribution and spreading behavior of different types of mouth actions in three sign languages. *Sign Language & Linguistics*, 11(1), 45-67.
Du Bois, J. W. 2007. The stance triangle. In Englebretson, R. (ed.), *Stancetaking in discourse : Subjectivity, evaluation, interaction*, 139-182 John Benjamins.
Dubuisson, C., Lelièvre, L., & Miller, C. 1999. *Grammaire descriptive de la LSQ* (Vol. 1). Université du Québec à Montréal.
Feyaerts, K. 2013. A cognitive grammar of creativity. In V. Tony, F. Kurt, & F. Charles (Eds.), *Creativity and the agile mind*, 205-228. De Gruyter Mouton.
Janzen, T., Shaffer, B., & Wilcox, S. 2011. Signed language pragmatics. In Östman, J.-O. & J. Verschueren (eds.), *Pragmatics in practice*, 278-294. John Benjamins.
Lyons, J. 1977. *Semantics*. Cambridge University Press.