This paper explores the notion of “blending” in artistic signing, using a variety of poems composed by British Deaf signers. I will argue that artistic signing utilises “grounded blends” (Liddell 2000) to provide a highly complex, creative, and often metaphorical representation of a poetic scene.

Over the last few years, British Sign Language (BSL) literature has developed into a rich and solid genre of structured signed texts. New research questions into the use of language in this particular genre have been formed, one of which is how Deaf poets represent their fiction world (narrative space) using the immediate physical environment (real space).

Building on Fauconnier and Turner’s theory of conceptual blending (1996), Liddell (2000) claims that in sign language narratives elements from the narrative space are projected onto the real space, generating a third space in which information from both input spaces are blended (for example, the signer in the real space “becomes” a character in the narrative space). In this blended space, events and characters from the story are "grounded" in the real space and presented with a here-and-now manner ("grounded blends").

Grounded blends are common in everyday narratives, but in this paper I will illustrate how they are used especially in poetic discourse. I will investigate:

1. multiple simultaneous blending: the poets provide both zoom-in and zoom-out views of the poetic scene simultaneously (e.g. an extended index finger represents a person in distance while the face represents the real-size face of that person)
2. body partitioning: part of the poets’ body behaves independently from the rest of their body (e.g. the poet’s right hand taps his or her own shoulder to draw attention)
3. violation of size and distance in the narrative space: the poets ‘hold’ and ‘play with’ entities in the narrative space, represented by the hands in the real space, which are conceptually too big or too distant (e.g. reaching out for the sun, cars on the street, etc.).
4. emergence of new features in blended space (e.g. manipulation of the speed of signing, such as slow motion effects, which reflects neither the timing of the real space nor that of the narrative space)

These phenomena may appear “strange” if we assume only a single space is involved, but they make perfect sense in grounded blends. I will consider how these approaches contribute to the metaphorical interpretation of the poem.

REFERENCES:

KEYWORDS: sign language, poetic signing, grounded blends, narrative space, real space, metaphor

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS: none (apart from the basic equipments such as a computer and a projector)

PREFERRED FORMAT: PAPER (POSTER is also fine)