Eyegaze in Creative Sign Language

Presentation at TISLR 10 (Theoretical Issues in Sign Language Research)
2nd October 2010
Purdue University

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Outline of the Talk

Introduction

Part 1: General Poetic Functions of Eyegaze

Part 2: Classification of Gaze Patterns
- Previous attempts on classifying gaze behaviours
- Narratives versus poetry
- Criteria for classification
- Five different gaze patterns

Conclusion
The Anthology of BSL Poetry

‘Metaphor in Creative Sign Language’ Project, University of Bristol (funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council)

Tio teckenspråkskonstnärer (“Ten sign language artists”) – DVD of poems and prose in Swedish Sign Language
Part 1
General Poetic Functions of Eyegaze
Poetic Use of Gaze

Show how (and how much) the poet is involved in the poem
Poetic Use of Gaze

Show how (and how much) the poet is involved in the poem
Poetic Use of Gaze

Highlights and reinforces manual signs
Juli af Klintberg “Mitt” (2009)
Donna Williams “Duck and Dissertation” (2010)
Poetic Use of Gaze

Provides additional information to complement manual signs
Paul Scott “Too Busy To Hug, No Time to See” (2009a)
Poetic Use of Gaze

Guides the audience smoothly during transition between signs
Poetic Use of Gaze

Extends the poetic scene beyond signing space
Johanna Mesch “Aeroplane” (2006)
Poetic Use of Gaze

Refer to invisible referents
Paul Scott “Tree” (2009)
Poetic Use of Gaze

Develop the story by itself, in absence of manual signs
Paul Scott “Too Busy To Hug, No Time to See” (2009b)
Poetic Use of Gaze

Adds symbolic values to the poem
Judith Jackson “Father”
Dorothy Miles “Evening”

Darkness, like a bat, flies close
Part 2

Classification of Gaze Patterns
Previous Research

Bahan and Supalla (1995)
1. Gaze to audience
2. Character’s Gaze
3. Gaze at hands

Engberg-Pedersen (1999)
1. Sender’s eye contact with the receiver
2. Imitative eye gaze
3. Configurational eye gaze
4. Sender’s reference-tracking eye gaze
Narratives versus Poetry

- Gaze behaviour in poetry is more complex and needs more detailed categorisation.

- Narratives & dialogues – The primary purpose is **communication** → Signers constantly look at the audience to make sure the story is understood.

- Poetry – The primary purpose is **aesthetic pleasure** → communicative intent is reduced, resulting in a wider variation of gaze patterns.
Gaze classification: criteria

(1) Where is the gaze directed?
   the audience (camera), hands, specified/unspecified referents

(2) What is the role of the poet?
   narrator, character, observer, ‘a poetic tool’

(3) What is the main function of the gaze?
   explain, show, highlight, foretell...
Gaze classification: criteria

(4) Is the gaze internal or external to the story?

(5) Does the gaze reveal a personality (a subjective viewpoint)?

(6) How is the gaze related to hands?
   independent, complementary, reactive, following or preceding hands

(7) Is the gaze omniscient?
   Or does it feign ignorance?
Five Gaze Patterns

(1) Gaze to the audience (camera)
(2) Character’s gaze
(3) Spotlight gaze
(4) Panoptic gaze
(5) Prescient gaze
Gaze to the Audience (Camera)

1. The gaze is directed toward the audience (camera)
2. The poet is in the role of *narrator*
3. The gaze is used to *explain* and *comment* on the story to the audience, or simply acknowledge their presence
4. The gaze is external to the story
5. The gaze has a personality (of the poet as him/herself)
6. The gaze is independent from manual signs
7. The gaze is omniscient
Richard Carter “Deaf Trees” (2009)
ÅsaMy Bjurling “Arv” (2009)
(1) The gaze direction varies
(2) The poet is in the role of a character
(3) The gaze is used to present a poetic scene through the eyes of a character
(4) The gaze is internal to the story
(5) The gaze has a personality (of a character)
(6) The gaze is usually independent of manual signs, unless the character is ‘seeing’ a referent expressed by hands
(7) The gaze is not omniscient
Richard Carter “Sam’s Birthday” (2009)
Martina Kvist “Tiger” (2009)
Spotlight gaze

(1) The gaze is on hands, or tracing the movement of the hands

(2) The poet becomes part of the narrative

(3) The gaze is used as ‘a poetic tool’. It functions like a camera or a spotlight and highlights manual signs.

(4) The gaze is internal to the story.

(5) The gaze does not involve subjective viewpoint.

(6) The gaze follows, and is dependent on, manual signing.

(7) The gaze is neither omniscient nor ignorant.
Paul Scott “Tree” (2009)
Richard Carter “Surprise Apple” (2009)
Panoptic Gaze

(1) The gaze direction varies
(2) The poet becomes part of the narrative
(3) The gaze is used to provide a panoptic view of the poetic scene
(4) The gaze is internal to the story
(5) The gaze does not involve subjective viewpoint
(6) The gaze is complementary to manual signs
(7) The gaze is omniscient
Prescient Gaze

(1) The gaze direction varies.
(2) The poet becomes part of the narrative.
(3) The gaze is used to **foretell** the location associated with the next sign.
(4) The gaze is internal to the story.
(5) The gaze does not involve subjective viewpoint.
(6) The gaze **precedes** manual signs.
(7) The gaze is **omniscient**.
Johanna Mesch “Winter (Haiku)” (2009)
# Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>To Audience</th>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Spotlight</th>
<th>Panoptic</th>
<th>Prescient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Direction</strong></td>
<td>audience</td>
<td>various</td>
<td>on hand</td>
<td>various</td>
<td>various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of poet</strong></td>
<td>narrator</td>
<td>character</td>
<td>poetic tool</td>
<td>poetic tool</td>
<td>poetic tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Function</strong></td>
<td>explain</td>
<td>show</td>
<td>highlight</td>
<td>provide whole picture</td>
<td>foretell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal/External</strong></td>
<td>external</td>
<td>internal</td>
<td>internal</td>
<td>internal</td>
<td>internal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personality</strong></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relation to hands</strong></td>
<td>independent</td>
<td>independent</td>
<td>follows hands</td>
<td>complementary</td>
<td>precedes hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Omniscience</strong></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

Eyegaze plays a crucial role in artistic signing. It is subtle, but contributes greatly to the overall impression of the poem.

Eyegaze in creative sign language can be categorised into several different patterns, depending on how poets want to present their story world.
Acknowledgement

Rachel Sutton-Spence and Donna West

Images and video clips are used with permission by Deaf poets (in alphabetical order): Juli af Klintberg, ÅsaMy Bjurling, Richard Carter, Judith Jackson, Martina Kvist, Johanna Mesch, Paul Scott, Donna Williams and John Wilson

The video of Dorothy Miles is from ECHO data set for British Sign Language (BSL), Department of Language and Communication Science, City University (London). http://www.let.ru.nl/sign-lang/echo
Want to see more poems?

1. Visit our webpage of online Anthology of BSL Literature
   ‘Metaphor in Creative Sign Language’ Project, University of Bristol
   www.bristol.ac.uk/bslpoetryanthology

2. DVD of Swedish Sign Language poems is available through Johanna Mesch
   (johanna.mesch@ling.su.se)