Then, Now and Beyond:
the use of self-enactments in layered stance-taking in VGT

Fien Andries

Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Arts, KU Leuven, Antwerp, Belgium

Enactment in signed interactions

In interactions, signers often use enactments, i.e. they combine "bodily movements, postures and eye gaze to 'construct' actions and dialogue in order to 'show' characters, events and points of view" (Hodge & Ferrara, 2014, p. 373). These enactments are usually not a reproduction of real-world actions or dialogues. Rather, the interlocutor constructs their version of these actions or dialogues, or of hypothetical events, and presents them through an enactment of characters (Tannen, 1989). Therefore, enactment is well-suited to be used in stance expressions, in which a'subject' evaluates a stance object through overt communicative means, aligning with other subjects (Du Bois, 2007). An interlocutor may use enactment to present the stance of the character they enact or their own stance. Moreover, enactment allows signers to stack multiple stances (Dancygier, 2012, p. 89): They convey their stance as a narrator in the present moment and can layer it upon the stances of characters they enact. In this contribution, I focus on cases of self-enactment where signers enact themselves at a moment when they became aware of a certain event or certain information, such as 9/11, the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami in 2004, or the death of Princess Diana. The aim of this research is to gain insight into how signers use self-enactments to tie together different epistemic and affective stances they took at different moments in time. Furthermore, I map out what polyphonic strategies signers use to express multiple stances from multiple viewpoints simultaneously.

Data and methods

For this contribution, the dataset consists of five hours of dyadic conversations in Flemish Sign Language (VGT) consisting of both free and guided conversations taken from the Corpus VGT (Van Herreweghe et al., 2015). I annotated and analyzed 427 cases of self-enactments in ELAN (Wittenburg et al., 2006) and analyzed 129 of these self-enactments in more detail, as they combined an enacted epistemic stance expression with a stance expression from a narrator's viewpoint. A multimodal and sequential in-depth analysis of 20 cases provided more comprehensive insights into the use of self-enactments.

Results

The results show that signers often use sequences of multiple enactments to create contrast showing the signer's change in epistemic status in the past, consisting of multiple components, of which a recurrent pattern is the following: 1) enactment of the past self, showing how they were unaware of an event, followed by 2) enactment of the past self, becoming aware of an event, including a layering of the epistemic and affective stance of the enacted character towards that event. This latter enactment is usually directly linked to an expression of stance in the here and now from the narrator's viewpoint. Signers may use a plethora of devices to create this polyphony. They can express stances from multiple viewpoints either simultaneously with the enactment of the character, using eye gaze shifts to the interlocutor, head nods, facial expressions like a frown or a mouth shrug, or sequentially, through the framing or the enactment or by elaborating on the enactment, lexically or gesturally. On a broader level, the enactments incorporate information on the barriers these signers faced in accessing information during topical events, addressing issues of communicative accessibility deaf signers may experience.

In sum, this study illuminates how signers use self-enactments to weave together diverse stances across time while also highlighting the challenges of communicative accessibility for deaf signers.

References

Dancygier, B. (2012). Negation, stance verbs, and intersubjectivity. In B. Dancygier & E. Sweetser (Eds.), *Viewpoint in Language: A Multimodal Perspective* (pp. 69–93). Cambridge University Press.

Du Bois, J. W. (2007). The Stance Triangle. In R. Englebretson (Ed.), *Stancetaking in discourse: Subjectivity, evaluation, interaction* (pp. 139–182). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Hodge, G., & Ferrara, L. (2014). Showing the story: Enactment as performance in Auslan narratives. *Selected Papers From the 44th Conference of the Australian Linguistic Society (2014)*, 372–397. https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Showing-the-story-%3A-Enactment-as-performance-in-Gawne-Vaughan/cc5fae968168cca1d33f146364cddf40dbbcdddd

Tannen, D. (1989). *Talking Voices: Repetition, Dialogue and Imagery in Conversational Discourse*. Cambridge University Press.

Van Herreweghe, M., Vermeerbergen, M., Demey, E., De Durpel, H., Nyffels, H., & Verstraete, S. (2015). *Het Corpus VGT. Een digitaal open access corpus van videos and annotaties van Vlaamse Gebarentaal, ontwikkeld aan de Universiteit Gent ism KU Leuven. <www.corpusvgt.be>*. http://hdl.handle.net/1854/LU-6973686

Wittenburg, P., Brugman, H., Russel, A., Klassmann, A., & Sloetjes, H. (2006). ELAN: a professional framework for multimodality research. *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation (LREC 2006)*, 1556–1559.