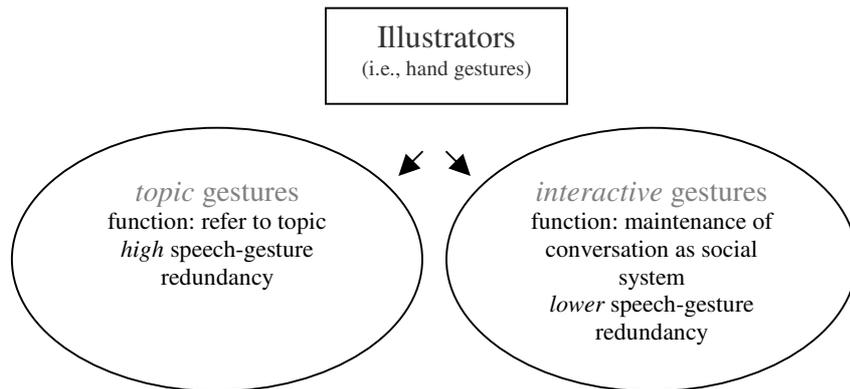

Interactive Gestures



Illustrators: hand gestures made during conversation
subcategorize *topic* and *interactive* gestures

Topic gestures refer to the topic. *Interactive* gestures refer to the interlocutor and function to maintain conversation as a social system. They subsume *beats* as well as *metaphoric* gestures.

Experiment 1

Same narrative task assigned to dyads and individuals.

Outcome: a) dyads had a higher rate of *interactive* gestures than individuals
b) individuals had a higher rate of *topic* gestures than dyads

Experiment 2

Narrative task assigned to dyads which were divided in 2 groups. In group 1 partners could not see each other. In group 2 partners were in face-to-face setting.

Outcome: a) the rate of interactive gestures is higher in face-to-face communication and decreases in setting where visual ability is manipulated
b) topic gestures are not affected by the condition

Conclusion: Topic and interactive gestures respond differently to social variables which strongly suggests that they are functionally different and ought to be divided into two groups.

Analysis 3: Speech-Gesture Redundancy

(evaluates data sets from Experiment 1 and 2)

Interactive gestures are less redundant with accompanying speech than topic gestures. This is in support of the assumption that they function to maintain involvement with interlocutor without interrupting verbal flow of discourse.

Identifying interactive gestures

Interactive gestures may be paralinguistic or not accompanied by speech. Just as any illustrators, two interactive gestures never are exactly alike. But, they share common features.

Example 1

... and of course there were chances they would write something wrong, you know?

Interactive Gesture [paralinguistic]: hand flick outward toward interlocutor, palm up, fingers curled with index stretched out towards listener

Social Function: Do you understand what I am saying?

Example 2

... and Customs is definitely is career oriented.

Interactive Gesture [non-paralinguistic]: hand movement towards listener, palm up, fingers curled, thumb pointing at listener at movement peak

Social Function: Reference, acknowledgement of listener's previously contributed idea

Note: signified meaning involves the interlocutors and not the topic (i.e., writing something or working somewhere)

Some characteristics of Interactive Gestures

Interactive Gestures include *metaphoric* gestures like the “conduit metaphor”¹. Another example of a metaphoric interactive gesture is: hand movement forward, palm facing up, fingers extended and curled (McNeill, 1985) accompanying, e.g. : What do you think?²

Further, most of the illustrators that were called *beats* (McNeill&Levy, 1982) or *batons* (Efron 1972; Ekman&Friesen, 1969) or *speech-primacy movements* (Freedman, 1972) can be subsumed under interactive gestures.

Out of the two illustrator subgroups, topic gestures overweight the relatively smaller group of interactive gestures.

Function: Interactive gestures mark primarily 4 discourse aspects

- a) *citing*
- b) *seeking* (agreement, help, understanding)
- c) *delivery* (of information)
- d) speaking *turn*

Form: Interactive gestures always include always some kind of iconic reference to the interlocutor.

“To be an interactive gesture , it must have a paraphrase that is both independent of the topic and addressed to the interlocutor. In addition, the form must be interactive, which means that the finder(s), thumb or open palm(s) are oriented directly toward the other person at some point, however briefly. The back of the palm, heel of the hand, or closed hand are negative criteria, i.e., not interactive in form.” (473)

¹ The Conduit Metaphor (Reddy) implies 3 conceptual metaphors: Ideas are Objects, Words are Containers and Communication is Transfer. Linguistic Example: *The ideas did not come across in your essay.*

² The metaphorical reasoning implied is: Ideas are Objects (which ought be placed in the hand as a metaphorical container by the listener) or Questions are Objects (and that ‘object’ is presented to the listener).

Conversation as a Social System: What does that mean?

Conversation here is seen not as altering monologues but as a social system. (476)

Importantly then, while only one person may speak at a time both partners must stay involved in the conversation. The function of interactive gestures is to maintain involvement with the interlocutor – as an antidote to veering off into monologue – *without* interrupting the verbal flow.

Some Thoughts

Bavelas concentrates on illustrators (hand gestures) and distinguishes between gesture and facial display in her analysis (469). However, she eventually subcategorizes facial displays and listener responses such as head nods under interactive gestures as well. (487)

- I think that a range of non-manual gestures serve interactive *functions* (remember the 4 parameters: citing, seeking, delivery and speaking turn) and thus should be regarded interactive gestures.

Here are the tiers I decided on in my analysis of political TV-interviews: illustrators, body posture, head posture, facial expression, gaze, eyebrows (possibly: breathing, which does not convey meaning via speech but must be regarded a non-verbal category)

Although Bavelas concentrates on speaker gestures she briefly mentions interactive listener gestures and interactive facial displays. (487)

- Highly interesting interactive gestures can be found on the side of the listener in the social system of interviewing (where it is not a mere question-answer game but rather an argument). An extremely high rate of listener responds through gesture can be found where non-verbal answering is the only option while one of the interlocutors is by structural definition in the listener role.

As defined in this paper, interactive hand gestures must include some kind of *iconic reference* to the interlocutor. This definition follows directly from their function: “We propose that interactive gestures (...) constitute a class with the common function of *including the listener* and thereby counteracting the beginning of a drift toward monologue that is necessarily created every time one person has the floor.” (476)

- Following that definition, some of the gestures that I am looking at in my data - like “fencing off” gestures - would not be regarded interactive gestures since they display no iconic reference to the talker.