Show and tell: Framing and narrating constructed action in signed and spoken languages

Kearsy Cormier
Deafness Cognition and Language Research Centre, University College London, k.cormier@ucl.ac.uk

Sandra Smith
Centre for Deaf Studies, University of Bristol, Sandra.D.Smith@bristol.ac.uk

Martine Zwets
Radboud University Nijmegen m.zwets@let.ru.nl

"Complex Sentences and Beyond in Sign and Spoken Languages" workshop, Lichtenberg-Kolleg, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Germany, 13-14 October 2011

Overview

• Background
  – Constructed action in sign language
  – Quotation in spoken language
  – Framing quotations in spoken languages

• Framing CA in BSL narratives
  – Methods
  – Results
  – Discussion

• Narration and CA in BSL narratives
  – Methods
  – Results

• Discussion and future directions
**Constructed action (CA) in sign languages**

- Signer uses his/her head, face, hands and/or body to enact all or some part of what a person/character does, thinks, or says
- Also known as ‘constructed dialogue’, ‘role shift’, ‘referential shift’
- May be mainly gestural demonstrations (a, b) or co-occur with lexical signs (c)
- These are examples of representation of action (non-quotative)

constructed action depicting a) a bear which is about to attack a person, b) the person who is about to be attacked pretending to be dead, and c) the bear looking down (with the BSL sign LOOK)

**Previous research on CA**

Including those who have attempted to distinguish representation of actions, thoughts, utterances:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Representation of utterances or thoughts</th>
<th>Representation of actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metzger 1995</td>
<td>Constructed dialogue</td>
<td>Constructed action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quinto-Pozos 2007</td>
<td>Constructed dialogue</td>
<td>Constructed action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pfau &amp; Quer 2010</td>
<td>Quotative role shift</td>
<td>Non-quotative role shift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lillo-Martin in press</td>
<td>Quotative CA/role shift</td>
<td>Non-quotative CA/role shift</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quotations in spoken languages

• Representation of utterances
  1. He said “I need some coffee”

• Quotations as demonstrations (Clark & Gerrig 1990)
  – Not only utterances but also thoughts, actions, feelings
  – Can be lexical, non-lexical sounds, visible gestures

• “Body quotations” (Streeck 2002)
  – Similar to demonstrations of visible gestures described by Clark & Gerrig 1990

• Representation of action: visible quotation/demonstration
  2. They were chatting… he didn’t see the telephone pole ahead and he went <imitates running into telephone pole>.

• Quotations can “show” utterances but also sound effects and visible actions
  – Not only individually but also simultaneously

Quotations in spoken languages

• In discourse, use of prosody and visible gesture help to provide structure to quotations that otherwise could be carried by grammar only
  – Gesture may replace linguistic constituents in spoken quotations (De Brabanter 2005)
  – Segments of reenactments within larger tellings involve coordination of gesture, talk and eyegaze (Sidnell 2006)
  – Syntactic resources, prosody and gesture “collaborate in the interactional management of the quote without overt realization of grammatical resources traditionally proposed for building quotations in Korean” (Park 2009)

• Not only within quotations but also to frame them beforehand:
  – Various devices such as grammatical framing and prosodic shifts may be used to mark the start and end of quotations (Bolden 2004, Sams 2010)
Establishing reference with quotations / Framing quotations in spoken languages

- Fully framed quotations
  - With NP identifying quoted referent and with quotative verb: say, go, be like, be all (Clark & Gerrig 1990, Rickford et al. 2007)
- Unframed quotations/Freestanding/Zero quotatives (Mathis & Yule 1994)
  - Lack of both quotative verb and NP identifying quoted referent – e.g.
    Mum called last night.
    "When are you coming home?"
    "Christmas, as usual."
- Partially framed quotations

Cameron (1998): Variable syntax of speech, gesture and sound effect in Spanish quotations

- Partially framed quotations in Spanish
  - With NP identifying quoted referent but with no quotative verb
  - Reported by Cameron (1998) for Puerto Rican Spanish (‘Y NP’)
    - ‘Y yo, "¡¿Ay qué hago?!"
    - ‘And I, "Oh, what should I do?"'
- Overall preference for fully framed quotations
  Entonces, yo digo, “¡Ahora prepdrate, que te voy a quitar un monton de cosas!”
  "Then, I say, "Now get ready, because I am gonna take away a lot of things!"
- But…
Cameron (1998): Variable syntax of speech, gesture and sound effect in Spanish quotations

- When fully framed quotations were not used:
  - Partially framed quotes were preferred with a switch in reference (i.e. introduction/reintroduction of referent)...
    - ‘Y yo, ¿¡Ay qué hago?!’
    - ‘And I, “Oh, what should I do?”’
  - While freestanding quotes were preferred with the same referent (i.e. maintenance)
    - Mi tío tenía una tienda cerca.
    - ‘My uncle had a store close by.’
    - Y siempre me escapaba de kinder... verdad.
    - ‘And I’d always cut out from kindergarten... you know.’
    - Entonces me metía escapando y que se yo para la tienda.
    - ‘So I cut out escaping or whatever into the store.’
    - “¿Qué paso?”
    - “What happened?”
    - “No tengo clase.”
    - “I don’t have school.”

Framing quotations in spoken languages

- Summary
  - Cameron 1998 reports:
    - Preference for partially framed quotes (with NP referent identified) in contexts of switch reference (including introduction & reintroduction)
    - Preference for freestanding quotes (with no NP referent identified) in contexts of maintenance
    - These patterns were found in his data not only for representation of utterances but also for gesture and sound effects
  - How is constructed action (CA) framed in sign languages?
Framing CA

- Typically use of noun phrase before CA to establish referent - esp for introduction of a referent in a discourse
  - [BEAR INDEX]_{NP} CA:bear-about-to-attack
  - [MAN]_{NP} CA:man-pretend-to-be-dead
- Constructed dialogue may be introduced by quotative verb (e.g. SAY) but verb is optional
  - [MAN]_{NP} [SAY]_{VP} CD:WHAT
  - [MAN]_{NP} CD:WHAT
- These patterns are claimed widely throughout the literature, for ASL and other signed languages (e.g. Engberg-Pedersen 1993, Emmorey & Reilly 1995, Liddell 2003, Sandler & Lillo-Martin 2006, Morgan 2006)
- Noun phrase identifying the referent generally considered unnecessary (even ungramamtical) if referent understood in context (Emmorey & Reilly 1998)
- However this topic has not been examined empirically
- We explore this topic with evidence from BSL narratives

Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language background</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>native</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaf adults from Deaf, signing families native signers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>early</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaf adults from hearing families who learned BSL 3-8 years old non-native signers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>late</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaf adults from hearing families who learned BSL after age 12 non-native signers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Task

- Participants were shown video clip and were asked to describe clip to a deaf adult native signer
- Stimulus video clip: Pink Panther cartoon
- No dialogue in the clip, only action
- Signed narratives were coded for CA and lexical signs using ELAN software

Coding CA: CA articulator tiers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CA-articulator</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CA-eyegaze</td>
<td>Break of eyegaze with addressee for purpose of enacting referent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA-head</td>
<td>Signer’s use of his/her head to represent head movement/posture of referent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA-face</td>
<td>Signer’s use of his/her facial expression to represent face of referent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA-torso</td>
<td>Signer’s use of his/her torso to represent torso movement/posture of referent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA-dom-arm/hand</td>
<td>Signer’s use of his/her dominant arm/hand to represent arm/hand of referent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA-ndom-arm/hand</td>
<td>Signer’s use of his/her nondominant arm/hand to represent arm/hand of referent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Coding for framing of CA

- NPs: Noun phrases in the gloss tiers
  – e.g. MAN ‘man’, MAN INDEX ‘the man’, INDEX ‘he’
- For each instance of CA, we coded preceding NP identifying referent of CA and any intervening material
NP/CA sequences identified

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NP₁ CA₁</td>
<td>Contiguous reference: Noun phrase followed immediately by constructed action of same referent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NP₁…CA₁</td>
<td>Local but not contiguous reference: Noun phrase followed by constructed action of same referent, but with intervening predicate(s) in between (e.g., VP or classifier construction)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZeroNP CA</td>
<td>No local reference: Constructed action with no local NP identifying that referent beforehand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NP CA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NP₁ CA₁</td>
<td>Contiguous reference: Noun phrase followed immediately by constructed action of same referent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[DOG]_{NP}: CA:dog

The dog (thinks) “Great!” and approaches.
### NP...CA

Local but not contiguous reference  
Noun phrase followed by constructed action of same referent, but with predicate(s) in between (VP or CL)

```
[INDEX MAN]_{NP} [CL:man-come BRING FROM TENT OUT]_{VP} CA:man  
'The man comes out of the tent with his saucepan; confused, he picks up the wet stick.'
```

### ZeroNP CA

No local reference  
Constructed action with no local NP identifying that referent beforehand - i.e. any immediately previous NP or classifier construction has different referent

```
[INDEX:dog]_{NP} [CL:dog SEE]_{VP} CA:man  
'He (the dog) is walking along and sees (the man) chopping the sign down and lighting the wood.'
```
Summary across all participants

(No differences by age of acquisition)

- Preference for NP CA (noun phrase followed by constructed action of that referent), cf. partially framed quotes
  - preferred for introduction and reintroduction
- Preference for ZeroNP CA (constructed action with no local referent), cf. freestanding quotes
  - preferred for maintenance

- Generally consistent with previous claims in sign language literature about reference establishment/framing of CA
  - Though the fact that even in maintenance the NP referent was identified ~20% of the time even when it would have been understood in context means this is probably not infelicitous as previously suggested
- Same patterns for BSL as reported in Cameron (1998) in Spanish speakers’ use of quotations/demonstrations (including sound effects and gestures)
- Using a broader concept of quotation than just representation of utterances & thoughts, to include representation of any communicative expression (including actions, visible or audible gestures, etc) provides some evidence that CA is quotation which is demonstration
Variable subject presence: similar pattern as framing CA

- Sociolinguistic studies on ASL (Wulf et al. 2002, for plain verbs) and Auslan & NZSL (McKee et al., in press, for plain, agreement and spatial verbs) have shown:
  - In contexts of ‘switch reference’, overt subject expression is preferred
    - FIND POSS.3(i) SEVERAL FRIEND DIE index-location
    - “It turned out some of their friends had died there. She knew people involved.” (Wulf et al. 2002)
  - Co-reference with previous clause favours subject omission
    - HAVE TWO STUDENT…
    - “I teach in that interpreter training program. I have two students in it from Oklahoma City.” (Wulf et al. 2002)

- Same pattern found for many spoken languages
- This shared patterning could reflect general semantic/pragmatic principles about accessibility in discourse (e.g. Ariel 2008, Chafe 1994)

CA = CD = quotation = demonstration

- Varying types depending on what is being represented…
  - utterances, thoughts, actions
- and how it is represented
  - Lexical material, visible/audible gesture/reenactment, or some combination, simultaneously and/or sequentially
- But often there is a combination of these elements and/or these types may be difficult to distinguish
Narration and CA in BSL narratives

- Are there differences in CA across signed and spoken languages?
  - What about the role of narrator during CA/quotations?
  - Start with BSL

Role tiers

- Primary Role (Role1)
  - Primary role, narrator as default; otherwise, the character/referent which the signer is characterising using CA

- Secondary Role (Role2, optional)
  - Could be narrator (if character is Role1)
  - Could be a character (if narrator is Role1)

- Having both Role1 and Role2 allows for mix of narrator/character roles

- Determined based on combination of:
  - Elements of narration (e.g. via lexical signs) vs. character’s actions/thoughts (e.g. via lexical signs or enactment)
  - Native signer intuitions
CA articulator/role dependencies

CA articulator tier(s) active

Role1/Role2 as character (non-narrator)

• Useful for keeping native signer intuitions in check
  – E.g. Break in eyegaze as marker of CA?
    Consider role
  – E.g. Coder intuition that signer is “in” character?
    Consider which articulators are marking CA

Overview of CA types identified

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CA type</th>
<th>Primary Role</th>
<th>Secondary Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>overt</td>
<td>Character</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>CA only, no element of narration. Native signer intuition: fully &quot;in&quot; character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reduced</td>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Narrator</td>
<td>Clear use of CA (e.g. strong/many articulators), but with some simultaneous narration (e.g. via lexical material). Native signer intuition: mostly &quot;in&quot; character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subtle</td>
<td>Narrator</td>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Some elements of CA (e.g. weak/few articulators), with some simultaneous narration (e.g. via lexical material). Native signer intuition: mostly &quot;out&quot; of character but also a bit &quot;in&quot; character.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cormier & Smith (2011); Cormier, Smith & Sevcikova (in prep)
Overt CA (representing man’s actions)

Reduced CA (narration of dripping wood)
Overt CA (again, representing man’s actions)

CA type: subtle

Role1: narrator
Role2: bad dog

CA-face
CA as “constructed”

- Not necessarily verbatim reproduction of what a referent said or did, but instead selectively constructed by the speaker/signer (Tannen 1989, Clark & Gerrig 1990, Metzger 1995)
  - Speaker/signer may construct the dialogue or action in a different way from how it actually occurred.

CA with commentary in spoken languages

- Also - previous research on spoken languages has shown that what is selectively represented within the CA/quotation may not be purely attributed to the referent. Some aspects are clearly attributed to the speaker instead.
  - “while using direct reported speech to purport to reproduce a former thought or locution, speakers often implicitly comment on the utterance” (Holt 2000)
  - Prosodic cues (e.g. exaggerated or loud voice, or high or low pitch) can be used to represent affect on the part of the speaker rather than the referent, i.e. what the speaker thinks or feels about the quotation
  - Similarly, extra prosodic or visible cues (e.g. particular facial expression or intonation) can be added to gestural demonstrations as a ‘commentary’ from the speaker (Clark & Gerrig 1990)
  - These ‘commentaries’ in spoken languages are generally affective (prosodic or facial expression) = elements of narration with CA/quotation
Example from Holt (2000)
• Lesley: Oh you know I’m broiling about something
• Joyce: What
• Lesley: Well that sale at the vicarage
• Joyce: Oh yes
• Lesley: Your friend ‘n mine was there. Mister R
• Joyce: Oh
• Lesley: And um we really didn’t have a lot’v change that day because we’d been to Bath ’n we’d been Christmas shopping but we thought we’d better go along to the sale ’n do what we could… we hadn’t got a lot of ready cash to spend… In any case we thought the things were very expensive
• Joyce: Oh did you
• Lesley: And uh we were looking round the stalls ‘n poking about ’n he came up to me ’n he said, Oh hello Lesley… ↑still trying to buy something f’nothing

Example of narrator commentary during quotation
• “Lesley uses prosody to portray the way in which the utterance [of Mister R] was said… [to] make it sound rhythmic, helping to give it a deliberate, grumpy, and patronizing sound…
• Thus, she purports to reproduce the way in which the comment was made, but at the same time this also implicitly indicates her attitude toward the utterance. By making it sound offensive, she invites the recipient to also find it so” (Holt 2000 pg. 437)
CA with commentary in sign languages

- Similar commentary/affect within CA is possible in sign languages
  - Can imagine similar example to Holt’s in a sign language
- These affective commentaries could also be considered elements of narration

CA in signed and spoken languages: Possible differences

- In spoken languages, the CA/quotation is more or less meant to be a demonstration of what the speaker said, did or thought.
  - Except for the affective commentaries just mentioned
- But narration co-occurring during CA in sign languages can be more than affect via prosody
  - Reduced CA
    - Signers may put a token of overt CA “on hold” to give some narrative information
  - Subtle CA
    - CA may also be activated during an otherwise token of clear narration
    - Different ways of maintaining narrative structure and cohesion
Conclusion

• CA = CD = quotation = demonstration = “showing”
• Following Metzger 1995, useful to continue using CA as umbrella term for all of these
• Important to keep in mind the commonalities between CA in sign languages and multimodal CA used by non-signers
  – Including common patterns in framing CA in signed and spoken languages
• While also acknowledging potential differences
  – E.g. ways in which narration may co-occur with CA (“telling” within CA)

Areas for further research

• Extent to which enactment or narration is more dominant, in signed languages vs spoken languages
  – Overt vs reduced vs subtle CA (Cormier & Smith 2011)
  – Are there correlates to these in spoken languages?
• Comparisons between
  a) the relationship between grammatical, prosodic, affective, and visible enactment in CA in sign languages, and
  b) the relationship between grammatical, prosodic, affective, and vocal/auditory enactment in spoken language quotations/demonstrations, also visible enactment (separate modality)
Acknowledgements

- PALM project team
  - Zed Sevcikova
  - Fanny Limousin
  - Ramas Rentelis
  - Kate Rowley
  - Musaab Garghouti
  - Raychel Hills
- All deaf participants who took part in this research
- More info about PALM project: http://www.dcal.ucl.ac.uk/Research/assoc1.html

References


References


---

References


