

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

Data



The Anthology of BSL Poetry

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

Tio teckensprakskonstnärer (“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

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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

John Wilson “Winter (Haiku)” (2006)



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)



Character's gaze

- (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)



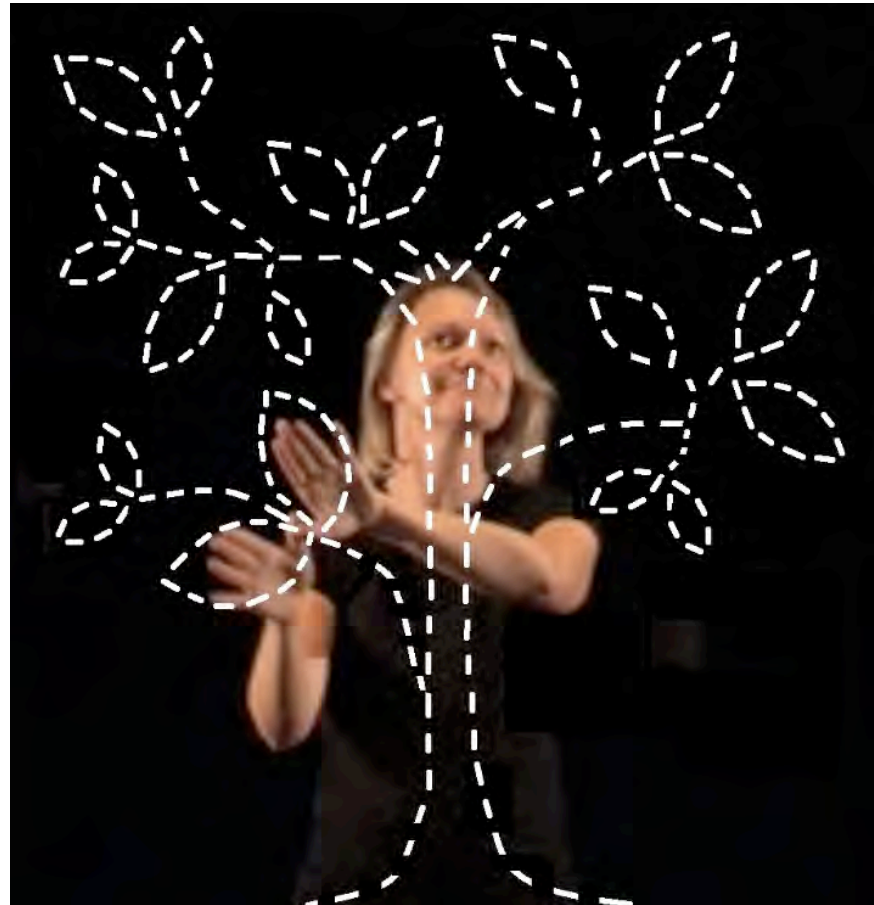
Panoptic Gaze

- (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**

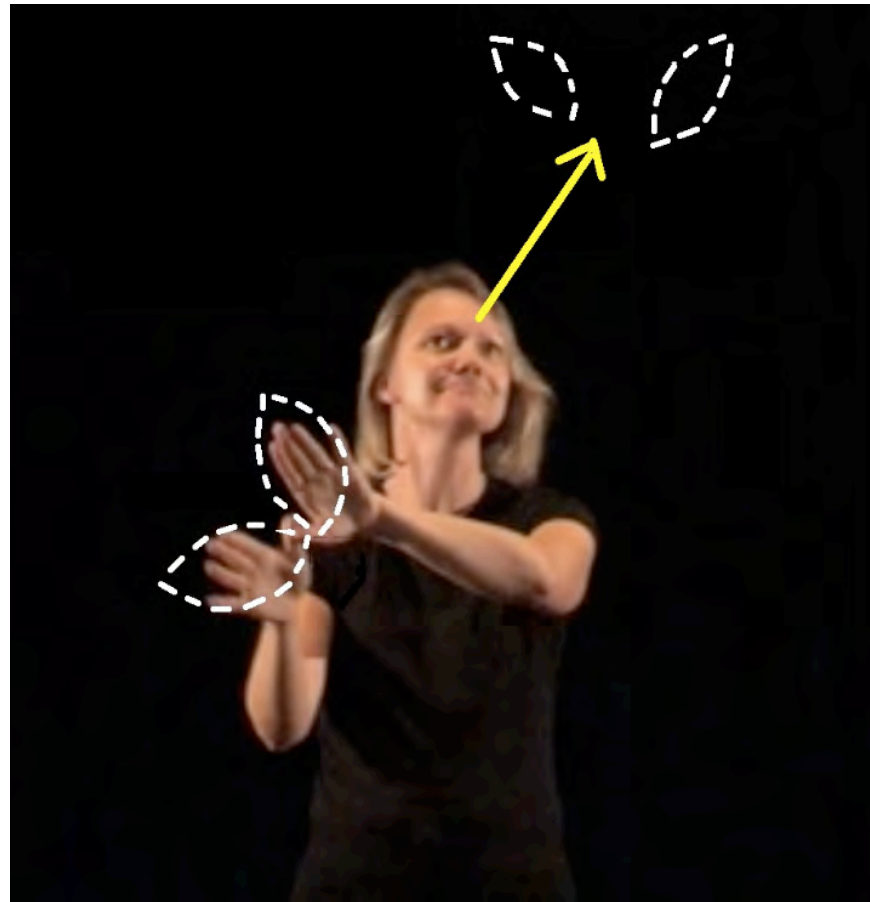
Johanna Mesch "Twin Leaves" (2006)



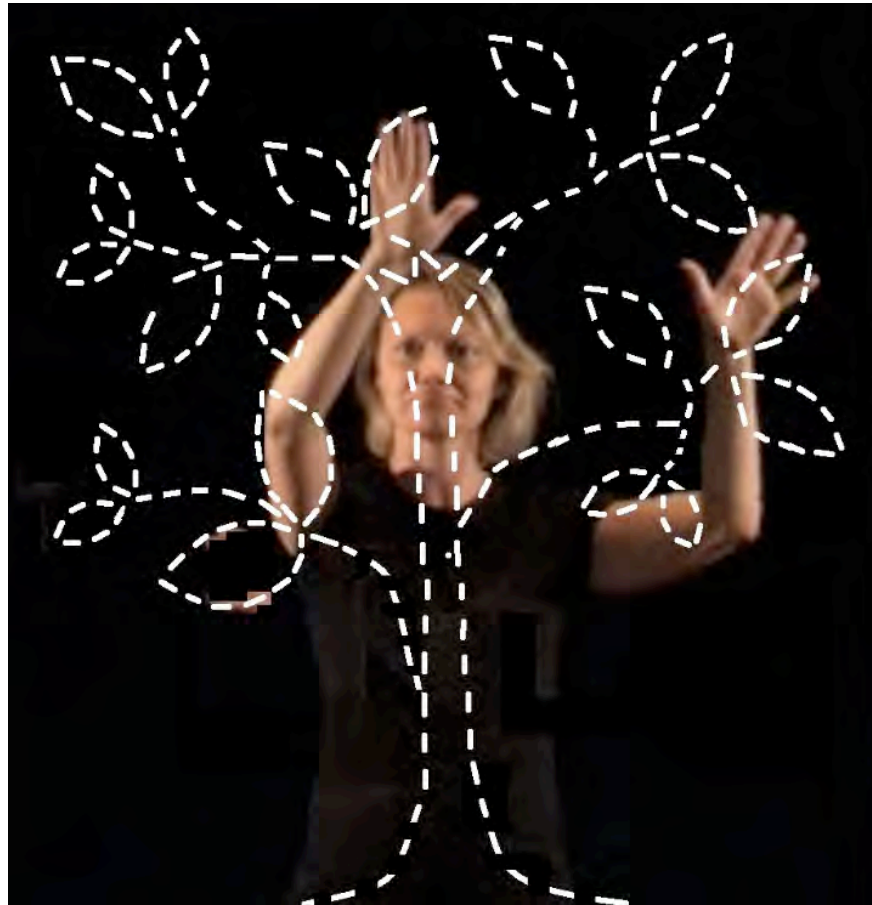
Johanna Mesch “Twin Leaves” (2006)



Johanna Mesch "Twin Leaves" (2006)



Johanna Mesch "Twin Leaves" (2006)



Johanna Mesch "Twin Leaves" (2006)



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)



Donna Williams “Identity” (2006)



Summary

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


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

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