ASL renditions of an English narrative: Accommodation through chaining and explaining/connecting in ASL

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questions
• What types of rhetorical devices are used in signed language?
• How do skilled signers deliver a narrative to different audiences?
• What types of discourse strategies are used for supporting comprehension?

a culturally-relevant narrative
• Story about the life of Don Petingill
  — a Deaf leader in the U.S. Deaf community
  — passed away in 2006
• Drafted in English, but delivered in ASL
• Two Deaf native signers (“Kevin” & “James”)
• Each signer shared narrative with 3 audiences

see Quinto-Pozos & Mehta (2010) for a complete description of the methodology

signers & their audiences
James
• children in elementary school
• senior citizens at Deaf Club
• adults at state convention of NAD

Kevin
• children in elementary school
• friends gathered at home for BBQ
• graduates & guests at Deaf high school commencement ceremony

example 1
excerpt of English narrative
“MSSD”

However, also during that time, Gallaudet University offered him a job as Coordinator of Off Campus Studies at the newly formed Model Secondary School for the Deaf (MSSD). So, in 1970, Don moved to Washington D.C. to, among other things, work with Deaf youth.

audience: young children
Kevin “MSSD”
audience: senior citizens
Kevin “MSSD”

Video here

audience: conference attendees
Kevin “MSSD”

Video here

our foci

✧ chaining: any example of the signer using more than one device (e.g., fingerspelled word, sign, point) to refer to the same entity

✧ connecting & explaining (our definition): any example of the signer communicating information that:
  a) is not in the original English text
  b) can be interpreted as supporting comprehension of a concept, object, or process.

coding criteria & conventions

✧ chaining: (bold font in examples)

✧ connecting & explaining: (underlined text in examples)

transcription and coding of Kevin’s ASL rendition of the ‘MSSD’ English text

young children
AGAIN, MOVE WASHINGTON D-C, WASHINGTON D-C. PRO-3SG MANAGE M-S-S-D, OTHER DEAF SCHOOL THERE WASHINGTON D-C M-S-S-D, MANAGE STUDY, HOW HIT ROFF CAMPUS, LIVE DORM HEAD-SHAKE, ROFF MOVE OUT, LIVE BAPT KNOW MOVE, STUDY HOW, HOW SUCCESS HOW STUDY.

senior citizens
THAT TIME PRO3SG GALLAUDET THERE GALLAUDET+ COLLEGE OFFER-HIM WORK MOVE-TO THERE, huh WHY? M-S-S-D M-0-D-0-EL S-E-C-O-N-D-A-R-Y SCHOOL FOR DEAF, #HIGH SCHOOL NEAR GALLAUDET DIVERSED TO EACH OTHER #HIGH SCHOOL POINT NEW SET-UP NEW NEED SOME ONE BRINGS IN ETHANOL RELATE DORM QUOTES, PRO-3SG ACCEPT MOVE TO RESEARCH ON ROFF CAMPUS PLAN HOW.

conference attendees

✧ explanation of a place, Washington D.C., as a location by use of a point to a locus
✧ connecting the concept, Washington D.C., to possible prior knowledge, as the capital of America

connecting & explaining
a closer look, Kevin
(young children)

THAT CAPITAL AMERICA POINT, WASHINGTON D-C.
connecting & explaining
a closer look, Kevin
(senior citizens)

M-S-S-D, M-O-D-E-L S-E-C-O-N-D-A-R-Y SCHOOL
FOR DEAF, #HIGH-SCHOOL NEAR GALLAUDET,
NEXT-TO-EACH-OTHER (CL:AA). #HIGH-SCHOOL
POINT, NEW SET-UP NEW.
◇ explanation of the location of an entity, MSSD
◇ connecting the entity by location and use of
depicting verb (i.e., classifier), as it relates to
Gallaudet University

example 2
excerpt of English narrative: “NAD”

At age 26, he invested in a printing shop for $9500, a
business where he hired and trained several Deaf
employees. His business printed some NAD publications
during this time. This is but one example of Don
supporting the Deaf community.

transcription and coding of James' ASL rendition of the 'NAD' English text

young children
ALL-OVER U-S, A NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR DEAF
MEAN SUPPORT HELP DEAF RIGHTS ALL-OVER U-S, A
DIVIDED-UP, (response to child: YOU RIGHT, YOU RIGHT)
D, I-L-L, I-A-D, DIFFERENT ALL-OVER, DIFFERENT ALL-OVER,
DIVIDED-UP, J-R N-A-D, YOU YOUNG BELOW, DIVIDED-
UP, J-R N-A-D, YES.

friends
HIRE SOME DEAF WORK<AGENT, ACTIVE, E-V-E-N N-A-D
PRESIDENT, N-A-D ALL-OVER U-S, PRINT MAGAZINE
FOR FOR PRINT: CONTINUE TO OLD-42…,

ALL-OVER U-S, A NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR DEAF
MEAN SUPPORT HELP DEAF RIGHTS ALL-OVER U-S, A
DIVIDED-UP, (response to child: YOU RIGHT, YOU RIGHT)
D, I-L-L, I-A-D, DIFFERENT ALL-OVER, DIFFERENT ALL-OVER,
DIVIDED-UP, J-R N-A-D, YOU YOUNG BELOW, DIVIDED-
UP, J-R N-A-D, YES.

graduates and family members
HERE-2H INDIANA MOVE-2H, WORK SAME V-R SERVICE
COUNSEL FOR DEAF CLIENT INVOLVE ACTIVE. AND
INVOLVE WITH J-A-D, PRESIDENT I INDIANA
ASSOCIATION DEAF UNDER N-A-D ALL-OVER U-S
ACTIVE.

audience: graduates and family members
James “NAD”

audience: young children
James “NAD”

connecting & explaining
a closer look, James
(young children)

OVER, DIVIDED-UP, J-R N-A-D, YOU YOUNG BELOW,
DIVIDED-UP, J-R N-A-D, YES.
◇ explaining the entity NAD, as a national organization
and its structure with state chapters (four examples
of state chapters)
◇ connecting the entity by utilizing the children’s
knowledge of the Junior NAD

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connecting & explaining
a closer look, James graduates and family members

AND INVOLVE WITH I-A-D, PRESIDENT I INDIANA ASSOCIATION DEAF UNDER N-A-D ALL-OVER U-S ACTIVE.

- explaining that Don was president of the local NAD chapter
- explanation of the entity, NAD, as residing over the Indiana state chapter

general comments about the data

chaining
- occurs with both child and adult audiences
- 5-10 instances per narrative

connecting & explaining
- occurs with both child and adult audiences
- not necessarily more common with children
- qualitatively more detailed for children in some cases
- occurs, on average, several times per minute

averages of connecting & explaining considering narrative length

one connection/explanation every X seconds

characterizing these strategies...

- a type of sociolinguistic variation
- conditioned by "stylistic factors," not strictly attributable to linguistic factors (Rickford & Eckert, 2001)
- "Style" is what an individual does with a language in relation to other people
- one model of "language accommodation": language style as "audience design" (Bell 1984, 2001)
  - speakers design (or plan) their style primarily for and in response to their audience

our hesitancy to use the term "accommodation"

- often used to refer to cases where the hearer/interlocutor is presumed to need less complex language
  - child-directed speech
  - Intergenerational communication (e.g., language directed at elderly people)
- the term "accommodation" is already commonly used within the Deaf community to refer to access to communication
our proposal

• these strategies for encouraging comprehension represent a type of stylistic variation influenced by:
  – knowledge of the linguistic resources of ASL
  – norms of the culture
• Deaf cultural norm: the need to share information (Lane, Hoffmeister, & Bahan, 1996)
• Possible way to refer to both types of strategies: shaping the message

shaping in the sign literature

• Deaf education:
  – Deaf teachers with children (Bailes, 1999, 2001; Christie et al. 1999; Lartiz & Lesnina 1995; Schiefer 1996)
  – acquisition of world knowledge & literacy (Bailes, 2001; Barbieri & Landolfi, 1994; Singleton & Morgan, 2006)
  – scaffolding (Cripps 2008, Corden 2001)
• Signed Language Interpreting:
  – expansion discourse strategies (Lawrence, 1994)
• Deaf Culture:
  – obtaining cultural literacy (Lane, Hoffmeister, and Bahan 1996, Singleton & Morgan 2006)

idea of shaping in the spoken language literature

• concept of chaining
  – reiterative code-switching
  • negotiation of a collective social identity (Pakir, 1989)
  • accommodation (Pakir, 1989)
  • amplification of a message (Tay, 1989)
  • emphasis (Auer, 1995; Eldridge, 1996; Tay, 1989)
  • reinforcement or clarification of a message (Auer, 1995; Eldridge, 1996)
  – use of translation equivalents in child-directed speech with bilinguals (de Houwer, 2009)

some answers to our questions

• What types of rhetorical devices are used in signed language?
  – chaining
  – connecting & explaining
• How do skilled signers deliver a narrative to different audiences?
  – by gauging what the audience may know and tapping into that knowledge
• What types of discourse strategies are used for supporting comprehension?
  – shaping strategies: chaining, connecting & explaining

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