Anthropomorphism in Creative Sign Language
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Anthropomorphism
This poster addresses the significance of anthropomorphism in sign language literature, using a variety of examples from a developing anthology of creative signing (poetry and stories) and comments from Deaf poets during a conversation about signed arts/forms. The poets found the ease of anthropomorphisation of different types of non-humans varied (some were easy, some challenging and some almost impossible): Animals - Monkey, Snake, Octopus, Crab, Snail, Lion, Tortoise, Bat, Spider, Zebra and Pig; Inanimate Objects - Lightbulb, Bicycle, Submarine, Mirror, Volcano, Clock, Star, Knife, Fork, Spoon and Pencil; and Abstract nouns - Anger, Beauty, Comfort, Death, Confidence, Emotion, Fragility, Genderiness, Honesty, Indifference, Loyalty, Luxury, Neglect, Nostalgia, Pride and Wisdom. Our approach to the anthropomorphic trope in signed literature is built upon creative views of metaphor; that our metaphorical understanding and representation of many concepts is based upon the everyday body experience of the language user, and that this is directly embodied in the artistic sign language by mapping elements of the non-human entity onto the signee's human form. Anthropomorphism occurs when we "ascribe human appearances and feelings to any animate or inanimate being" (Spada 1997: 37). Additionally, they may be given the power of human language (Paxson, 1994). This trope is widely used within artistic sign language (see for example, Tree, Too Busy to Hug, Prince Looking for Love, Snow Globe, Ocean, Turkey at www.bsllit.co.uk/ bsllpoetryanthology).

Shared Thinking Processes
We invited four Deaf poets, Richard Carter, Paul Scott, Donna Williams and John Wilson, to participate in a conversation in which they shared their creative, cognitive and linguistic processes with each other to witness and share the 'live, real-time' development of anthropomorphisation within artistic sign language. As we asked the poets to think about whatever they were thinking, doing or feeling as they made meaning of the questions asked and created anthropomorphical examples. This enabled them to explore the concept together and jointly create poetic examples of anthropomorphisation. The poets became more and more involved in the process as the research developed and as they became more comfortable with each other. They encouraged each other through questions and reinforcement, they discussed meanings, explored creative possibilities, built on and extended each others' initial creations, offered feedback, critique and counter-counter to each other and developed humorous, poignant, clever, skilful and entertaining narratives and vignettes. Please see the QuickTime video for edited highlights of their discussion.

Observations
Deaf poets use anthropomorphism, personification, exemplars and theomorphism in these examples. They experiment with familiar imagery, and sophisticated linguistic and narrative development. Anthropomorphism also incorporates Deaf cultural norms, communication and behaviour. In addition to signing, for example, Monkey is ex-mainstream, and Pig relies on his social worker. Narrative development and extension enable creative, poetic and humorous shared interactions among the poets. Spider who is good for security (see CCTV example above) becomes the housekeeper, with the keys to all the guest-rooms. Being a spider, with eight legs, eight doors can be unlocked simultaneously. The sign OCTOPUS uses the same handshape and movement as CAREFUL. This extends to "Here comes the Octopus, we must be careful", and the Octopus becomes a Detective. If there is a Detective there must be a crime. The Cable becomes a murder mystery!

All communication is visual: Animals can sign if they have limbs, claws, whiskers, hands, trotters; they can gesture or communicate if they have faces, or moveable limbs; they can write if they can leave a trail, or spin a web. They can communicate through facial expression.

We accept the poet using 'human' signs to convey an animal's thoughts or emotions in the absence of limbs or mouths. The poets turned to vignettes or extended narrative with inanimate objects. The harder it is to embody an object by direct mapping, the more likely poets are to construct a narrative to demonstrate human characteristics. Very few objects lend themselves to signed communication. In the absence of limbs, the face and body movement become far more important. Thoughts and emotions are also conveyed through actions, and through the poet's human signs. We accept the migration from an unhappy Submarine as conveyed on the face, to the thoughts of Submarine as signed by Richard Carter. Some inanimate objects do not communicate; they act, behave or respond as human actions (Volcano sneezes or loses its tempest, Lightbulb blows out the fire when tapped on the shoulder).

Abstract nouns are far harder to work with and several were rejected by the poets. The English word on paper lacks a visual cue, or results in ambiguity. Abstract nouns in BSL are generally derived from adjectives or verbs through embodied actions; BSL does not distinguish 'confidence' from 'confident', from 'being confident'. Some attempts to anthropomorphise abstract nouns begin with animal exemplars (for example, Death as crystal ball, or Envy as a house) yet seem quickly to become human forms possessing or expressing those abstract nouns (Death is not a crystal ball but the fortune teller who foresees death; the house is enviable of the houseowner's new house's windows, but envy is then transferred to the owner of the house, when the house demands a new car). Poets may also animate the sign (e.g. CONFIDENCE, E-N-V-Y). Exemplary characteristics of the qualities described by the word are seen in the letters of the word, that is, the signer.

Animals
Appearance and behaviour (Conventional): Monkey as mischievous and bawdy, Snake as untrustworthy, Lion as noble, Pig as weak, dependant, Tortoise as haughty, dismissive of the form of the sign). Octopus as detective, Crab as gossip (same handshape for CRAB as for Gossip). (Physiology): Crabs as craters - were claws - and legs very useful. Spider as CCTV (many eyes) and secretary (many hands).

Communication: Monkey can sign with hands. Octopus can sign with tentacles - signs either use '1' handshape, or tentacles can fingerspell (Limbs = fingers). Lion's claw can be anthropomorphised because it has a 'face' and 'hands'. Bicycle cannot breathe until its tyraxes are inflated. Sign for Extent of Mirror can be adapted to LONGLY. Lightbulb is anthropomorphised as sitting patiently waiting for tap on shoulder, and then 'light fire' and then 'blow out fire'. Volcano anthropomorphised as bodily response - to pain, to emotion - as a living action or reaction.

Appearance and behaviour: Clock can be anthropomorphised because it has a 'face' and 'hands'. Bicycle cannot breathe until its tyraxes are inflated. Sign for Extent of Mirror can be adapted to LONGLY. Lightbulb is anthropomorphised as sitting patiently waiting for tap on shoulder, and then 'light fire' and then 'blow out fire'. Volcano anthropomorphised as bodily response - to pain, to emotion - as a living action or reaction.

Communication: For Clock limited to '1' handshape, e.g. TELL so Clock tells you what to do (anthropomorphised as parent: "Time for bed!"). Mirror, Spoon and Streetlamp can communicate via face, lip-patterns and body. With Submarine, Streetlamp and Bicycle thoughts and emotions are signed as human signs (Submarine: YOU DON'T KNOW ME HUMAN HAVE). Fork can sign, as it has prongs, but only with V Handshape. Pencil anthropomorphised almost exclusively with face (as pencil point) so emotions are communicated through facial expression, and reactions to paper rubbing on face (WRITING) and pencil sharpening sharpening head.

Inanimate Objects
Appearance and behaviour: Clock can be anthropomorphised because it has a 'face' and 'hands'. Bicycle cannot breathe until its tyraxes are inflated. Sign for Extent of Mirror can be adapted to LONGLY. Lightbulb is anthropomorphised as sitting patiently waiting for tap on shoulder, and then 'light fire' and then 'blow out fire'. Volcano anthropomorphised as bodily response - to pain, to emotion - as a living action or reaction.

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Abstract Nouns
Appearance and behaviour: Luxury, Envy, Death and Wisdom anthropomorphised as literary or conventional entirely human forms (Luxury as fat/lazy; Death carries a scythe; Wisdom as old Greek philosopher; Envy has green eyes). Pride is offered as a humorous, ironic story about sexual reproduction where anthropomorphised sperm compete in order to reach and fertilise the egg. Attempts to move away from human form: Death as fortune teller's crystal ball, or as an aggressive dog (theriomorphism). Envy as a house, envious of neighbouring house's new windows. Confidence as substantialised form of the sign: CONFIDENCE (C) experiences the emotions associated with NOT-CONFIDENT and then CONFIDENT through a brief vignette. Beauty transcends cliché of 'beauty on the inside' or plastic slash/"fake beauty" and becomes exemplar: BEAUTY AS PLASTIC SURGEON. Fragility exemplified as both elderly person sensitive to noise, and then as person on operating table having open surgery.

Communication: Envy is developed acronimically: N + OD, Y + YES, E + ENERGY and V keeps N and Y apart. Envy as a house also makes increased demands in order to 'keep up' with the neighbours.

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