

The Center for Gesture, Sign, and Language Fall Workshop

Can you quote an action? Iconic event modification in sign, speech, gesture, and writing

Kate Davidson (Yale University Cognitive Science and Linguistics)

When: Monday, October 13, 4-6pm

Where: Stuart Hall Room 101

To RSVP: Click [here](#)

Sometimes form-meaning mappings in language are not arbitrary, but iconic: they depict what they represent. Incorporating iconic elements of language into a compositional semantics faces a number of challenges in formal frameworks as evidenced by the lengthy literature in linguistics and philosophy on quotation/direct speech, which iconically portrays the words of another in the form that they were used. In this talk I will compare the well-studied type of iconicity found with verbs of quotation with another form of iconicity common in sign languages: classifier predicates. I argue that these two types of verbal iconicity can, and should, incorporate their iconic elements in the same way using event modification via the notion of a context dependent demonstration (Clark and Gerrig 1990, Zucchi 2012). This unified account of quotation and classifier predicates predicts that a language might use the same strategy for conveying both, and I argue that this is the case with role shift in American Sign Language (Liddell 2003). Role shift is used to report others' language and thoughts as well as their actions, and recently has been argued to provide evidence in favor of Kaplanian (1979) "monstrous" indexical expressions (Schlenker 2003, Schlenker 2014a-b). By reimagining role shift as involving either (i) quotation for language demonstrations or (ii) "body classifier" (Supalla 1982) predicates for action demonstrations, the proposed account eliminates one major argument for these monsters coming from sign languages.

Throughout this talk, I'll stress that sign languages provide a fruitful perspective for studying quotation and other forms of iconicity in natural language due to their (i) lack of a commonly used writing system which sometimes obscures aspects of natural language, (ii) the rich existing literature on iconicity within sign language linguistics, and (iii) the ability of role shift to overtly mark the scope of a language report. In this view, written language is merely a special case of a more general phenomenon of sign and speech demonstration, which accounts more accurately for natural language data by permitting more strict or loose verbatim interpretations of demonstrations through the context dependent pragmatics.

This event is free and open to the public. ASL-English interpreting will be provided. Persons with disabilities who need an accommodation in order to participate in this event should contact Laura Tharsen at ltharsen@uchicago.edu. Organized by [The Center for Gesture, Sign, and Language](#) with support from the [Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society](#) and the [Workshop in Linguistics and Philosophy](#).