Figurativity as bodily experience: Gestural patterns in various types of discourse

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Figurative meaning is often described as relying on various image schemas that result from mental extension of bodily experiences (Grady 1997; Johnson 1987; Taylor 2002). Recently, embodiment and figurativity have become more explicitly linked to multimodal behaviors which, quite literally, include the body of a speaker (Dancygier 2017; Cienki, Iriskhanova 2018; Müller 2014, 2019). In multimodal cognitive linguistics which studies the orchestrations of written discourse with pictorial components, spoken discourse with prosody, or speech with gestures (Dodane, Boutet, Didirková et al. 2019), it is the verbal modality that is traditionally treated as major semiotic and communicative resource, and other modalities are viewed as complementing it. Indeed, co-speech gestures usually synchronize with words, and not vice versa. However, these semiotic modalities are combined differently in different types of discourse, with gestures playing an important role in realizing both global and local intentions of the speakers.

To explore the role of speech and gesture modalities in the construal of meaning, we study the semiotic functions of gestures in various types of discourse (Iriskhanova, Cienki 2018). From the functional perspective, we consider co-speech gestures as being both discourse-initiated and discourse-dependent. From the semiotic perspective, we argue that the semiotic continuum of gestures (Kendon 2004) is not so much about being more or less "sign-like" (in comparison to linguistic signs), as it is about gestures being signs in a variety of ways depending on the types of discourse. Thus, we hypothesize that discourse can put some constraints on how semiotic features (conventionality, semanticity, pragmatic transparency, autonomy, social and cultural import, metaphoricity, indexicality, etc.), as well as the functions of co-speech gestures, play out in the embodied construal of meaning.

In this session, we present the results of a series of empirical studies in several types of multimodal discourse (descriptive, argumentative, instructional, poetic, etc.) with the aim to investigate common and specific semiotic functions of gestures in multimodal communication. The results demonstrate the distribution and variance in semiotic features and functions of gestures in different discourse types, as well as their specificity in these discourses. It may prove that certain patterns of gesture functions can be viewed as indicators of certain types and genres of spoken discourse. The studies also show that speech and gesture construal does not display rigid

synchronization patterns, which additionally points to unique semiotic meaning of gestures as an autonomous semiotic resource.

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