Facial Displays as Stance Markers in Multimodal Spoken and Signed Constructions

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Dancygier (2012) introduced the term stance-stacking to describe a constructional phenomenon wherein multiple expressions of stance create a constructional cluster. We adopt a cognitive grammar (CG) framework to analyze the role played by three facial displays in the expression of stance in co-speech gesture and in signed language constructions. Two aspects of CG that we will use in our analyses are *epistemic control* and *reality conception* (Langacker 2013). Epistemic control concerns the formulation, assessment, and incorporation of a proposition into a conceptualizer's body of knowledge. Reality conception refers to the conceptualizer's "take" on reality, which is a fundamental component of stance.

The three facial displays we examine are brow furrow, eye aperture (squinted/wide), and horseshoe mouth (corners of the lips pulled downward. We investigate these facial displays in the context of signed utterances in American Sign Language (ASL) and Iranian Sign Language (ZEI), and spoken/gestural utterances in American English and Farsi. We find several broad stance functions associated with these three facial displays across the languages and modalities investigated. All three contribute to categories associated with the expression of epistemic stance. Brow furrow is associated with different degrees of certainty, including absence of certainty or doubt when used in a construction with squinted eyes. Squinted eyes and wide eyes often make covert reference to the common ground of the discourse, thus serving an intersubjective function. Horseshoe mouth expresses epistemic assessment. Specifically, it indicates the speaker's/signer's inclination to accept or reject what is being asserted in the propositional content expressed manually in ASL and ZEI and in the spoken utterance in American English and Farsi.

These facial displays occur both simultaneously with each other and with the spoken or signed channel, or in sequential constructions within and across each modality. In all cases the result is a higher-level constructional cluster of stance expressions.

References

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