Embedded viewpoint and stance in gesture and speech: multimodal stance-stacking

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In multimodal communication, the gestural channel and speech channel both express aspects of real or imagined speaker stance. As discussed in Sweetser 2014, different "channels" within the visual medium have distinct advantages in presenting layers of stance. It has long been recognized that in ASL, the head is a primary locus of grammatical marking (topic, questions) and also of affective space. In gesture, gaze is distinguished as the most easily shifted parameter; even while otherwise fully enacting a character, a narrator may visually "check" her interlocutor's reaction (Sweetser and Stec 2016). It has also been observed (Wehling 2017, Sweetser and Sizemore 2008) that discourse-regulating markers correlate with gestural ones.

In a single-sentence TV interview example (from UCLA's Red Hen corpus), the interviewee says, *If you've seen my movies…they're not all that good.* His verbally expressed (negative) evaluative stance towards described content is indirect, layering *good* under the attenuating Negative Polarity marker *(not) all that*, rather than just saying *bad*. In the visual channel, a two-palm-out defensive "don't kill me" gesture and an apologetic smile socially mitigate this negative evaluative context by adding humorously self-deprecating stances towards the audience – forestalling blame (whether for making poor movies or alternatively, for bad-mouthing movies the audience might like). A final two-palm-up presentational gesture strengthens the positive epistemic stance of the statement ("you see") – but is mitigated in the linguistic track by the preceding speech-act conditional clause (*If you've seen my movies*). Thus within this single sentence, the speaker layers his negative evaluative stance both verbally (under an attentuating NPI and inside a speech-act conditional qualifier), and gesturally (with alternating apologetic-defensive and strong-presentational markers).

Quoted-speech examples involve even more layering, since the actual speaker's stance and the quoted speaker's stance are both relevant, and both potentially expressed in both speech and gesture (examples from an elicited American story-telling corpus, (Sweetser 2014, Sweetser and Stec 2016). For example, a story-teller may simultaneously enact more than one character, frequently with one character being the "continuity" core character and the other more temporarily reflected. One story-teller, recounting a discussion with her boyfriend about teasingly putting a laundry basket on top of their cat, alternates head direction and emotive facial expressions (looking up and left as her Past Self, and down and right as the taller boyfriend) while her hands continue throughout to enact the boyfriend's basket-holding hands. In another example, the narrator turns to her real-world interlocutor to respond to a question; although her gaze/head direction and facial expressions are those of her real-world Self, her hand-shape remains that of a document-holding character, retaining the embedded space of the character and the narrative.

In sum, for a single subject, affect-representation is already "stacked" in complex ways as speakers/gesturers multimodally indicate their multiple layers of stances; with multiple subjects represented by a single speaker/gesturer, complexity shifts to viewpoint embedding, and "stacking" the multiple subjects' stances. Head direction and gaze remain the most fluid parameters, while body and hands represent more stable and ongoing layers of stance.

References
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