

## How to do Things with Words and Gesture Bimodal Speech Acts

Cognition is the basis of speech and gesture as co-produced and co-perceived channels of communication. While gesture semantics receive much attention, to date no systematic account of pragmatic form and function of gesture has been given. Previous analyses of gesture pragmatics (i) spotlight interactive gesture (Bavelas, 1999; author, 2007) and (ii) are unconcerned with modifying the prevalent theoretical speech act framework (Speech Act Theory: Austin, 1962; Searle, 1996). I investigate full and partial speech act functions of three gesture categories: content gesture, emblem and interactive gesture (IG, henceforth), analysing their relation to propositional content and illocutionary force. I show that specific gestures (i) add to content, (ii) enforce or modify illocutionary force or (iii) embody content and force as autonomic speech acts.

Content gestures contribute to the propositional content of a speech act, by depicting speech content or introducing new content. Emblems, I argue, may function as autonomic speech acts. Example: Performing the *thumbs up* sign as an EXPRESSIVE, the content being 'well done'. Shared access to the act is provided via cognitive frames, regarding world knowledge and context. I.e., the above emblem performed by an Emperor in ancient Rome means 'he may live', not 'well done'. Further, emblems change illocutionary force as do utterances. Example: "Hey!" functions as GREETING, PLEAD or WARNING depending on context and intonation and so does a hand wave (performance style as intonation equivalent).

Emblems further function as COMMISSIVES in relation to constitutive rules. Example: Raising an index finger in an auction (context) puts one under obligation to buy (via constitutive rule). My work further shows that emblems (i) act as the sole illocutionary force of a COMMISSIVE with the content lying in the utterance and (ii)/(iii) modify the speech act force. Examples:

- (i) Performative emblem changing speech act from DECLARATIVE to COMMISSIVE  
Forming the *I swear* sign while uttering a sentence that does not contain a performative: "I did not eat the cookie."
- (ii) Emblem that must accompany spoken performatives in institutionalised context  
E.g., Swearing-in in court, religious ceremony
- (iii) Emblem functioning against COMMISSIVE  
Crossing one's fingers while swearing.

My categorization of IG speech act functions draws from analyses of political interview. I show that co-speech IG may accentuate illocutionary force of direct speech acts or bring to surface the covert force behind indirect speech acts, as in the following example from a George W. Bush interview:

- (iv) Context: Interviewer interrupts George W. Bush, who reacts as reported below  
Utterance tier: "May I finish?" [overt: QUESTION; covert: DIRECTIVE]  
Gesture tier: metaphoric *hold back/fence off* gesture, i.e. arm moves towards interlocutor, palm facing interlocutor, stroke final downward movement of hand [illocutionary force: DIRECTIVE]

Thus, IG provide visual cues (bimodal perception) to access speaker intention (bimodal production) based on shared mental concepts like frames and metaphors. I further introduce instances of IG functioning as autonomic speech acts, direct and indirect.

Finally, I show that while IG are used perform autonomic indirect speech acts, there is no evidence that emblems function in this fashion.

## **References**

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## **Data**

Interview with George W. Bush on RTE Ireland:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mp4vLBvU1bA&feature=related> [04/05/2008].