

Rethinking 'Verbal' and 'Non-Verbal' in Discursive Performance*

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The boundary between verbal and non-verbal messages must be erased in a good many cases when sentences are studied as addressed acts of speech.

Hymes 1971: 63

Introduction: Signed and Spoken Languages

It is widely assumed that sign languages are secondary semiotic phenomena that only come into being when deafness prevents the normal acquisition of a spoken language. That this is not always the case is well illustrated by the sign languages used by contemporary indigenous Australian groups (Kendon 1989), and the sign language shared by indigenous peoples of the Plains region of North America (Farnell 1995a; Taylor 1996). These peoples use sign languages *in addition to* conventional spoken languages, not instead of them. They therefore offer an interesting challenge to definitions of language as traditionally constituted in Western thought, whereby only certain aspects of spoken language practices have counted as 'truly' linguistic (Tedlock 1983).

Historically, it is interesting to note that peoples such as Australian Aborigines and Plains Indians were of considerable interest to 19th century scholars, because evolutionary theory supported a view of gestural signs as probable precursors to speech. The embodied linguistic practices of these Non-European peoples contributed to their classification as 'savages' or 'primitives', well removed in both geographical space and evolutionary time from the linguistic practices of 'civilized' peoples (i.e. Europeans). Since evolutionary theory fostered a perception of sign languages as inferior to spoken languages, 'Aborigines' and 'Indians' came to share with deaf persons an assumed pathology based on a resort to gestures *instead of* speech. From the upper class Victorian English perspective, even the French and Italian were questionable in this regard, since they too were prone to accompany their speech with much gesticulation (see Tylor 1865; Farnell 1995: chapter 1). If evolutionary assumptions led to a view of gesture as precursor to speech, then this also left unexamined possible connections between gestural signs and spoken signs.

This evolutionary hierarchy, wherein 'real' language as spoken is distinguished from both sign languages and gesture, has deeper meta-theoretical roots in the dualistic notion of 'person' perpetuated by the Platonic-Cartesian tradition.

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Generally speaking, the Western model of person provides a conception of mind as the internal, nonmaterial locus of rationality, thought, language and knowledge. In opposition to this, the body is regarded as the mechanical, sensate, material locus of irrationality and feeling. After Darwin (1872) such physicality has most often been understood as natural rather than cultural, a survival of our animal past, perhaps. In Western academia, this bifurcation has led to a valorization of spoken and written signs as “real” language, internal to the reasoning mind of a solipsistic individual, to the exclusion of other semiotic (i.e. meaning-making) practices, thereby bifurcating intelligent activities. This, in turn, has produced a radical disjunction between verbal and so-called non-verbal aspects of communication in our meta-linguistic discourse (Farnell 1999: 345-6).

Although dictionary definitions of the term ‘non-verbal’ refer to an absence of words, in practice, as a negative appellation, it has become largely synonymous with the absence of language and mind. As such, the term provides a conceptual repository for all those qualities that traditionally reside on the less-valued side of the oppositions mentioned above: gestural signs are classified as natural, sensate, emotional, non-rational, non-linguistic, pre-conceptual and holistic (i.e. non-segmentary).¹

It is this Platonic-Cartesian conception of person and associated disembodied language ideology that this paper seeks to challenge. The analysis assumes a post-Cartesian theoretical position that is grounded in ‘new realist’ conceptions of human agency and a semasiological approach to the anthropology of human movement.² This provides a radically different perspective from which to explore how an American-English speaker, and a Nakota (American Indian) speaker/sign talker, consistently and systematically *integrate* vocal signs (speech) with action signs (manual gestures) to create dynamically embodied talk in socially constructed, inter-subjective, corporeal spaces.³

The analysis of data presented below examines some aspects of metaphor and pronoun deixis that provide interesting points for comparison. The utterances themselves illustrate cultural differences in the metaphysics of body/mind relations and the language ideologies that give rise to their form. Prior to this, however, it is necessary to provide some brief contextual information about Plains Indian Sign Language.

A Plains Indians Model of Language

During the 19th century, Plains Indian Sign Language (or Plains Sign Talk) was a *lingua franca* among all the indigenous peoples of the Plains region in North America, from Canada down to Texas. Historical records show that it was in use at the time of contact with Europeans, and remained widespread until the middle of the 20th century, by which time English fulfilled the inter-tribal function. Today, although fluent sign talkers are rare in most indigenous Plains communities, Plains Sign Talk remains active in numerous contexts, including storytelling, public oratory, ritual events, games, dances, and other social events. Unless the social situation precludes the use of speech — as in some ritual contexts, or when the volume of a musical performance makes hearing difficult — people use Plains Sign Talk (hereafter PST) and speech

simultaneously. This can take various forms. In informal, everyday, interaction, PST signs frequently accompany speech, especially if the indigenous spoken language is used (languages such as Nakota, Crow, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Blackfoot, and Kiowa). This creates a bi-modal practice, the visual-kinetic component of which draws upon the lexicon and spatial grammar of PST. In these contexts, the visual-kinetic signs do not necessarily combine to form utterances that could stand alone, rather, they work *with* the vocal component to create and communicate meaning. These co-expressive or bi-modal uses of PST with speech thus appear very similar to the discursive practices of people elsewhere.

Kendon (1980) observes that when used without speech, manual gestures soon begin to take on grammatical properties that make them work in discursive strings. It is plausible to suppose that Plains Sign Talk evolved this way during centuries of inter-tribal communication. Manual gestures became increasingly conventionalized, articulated in units that were consistent, and combined in discursive strings with grammatical properties. Plains Sign Talk utterances became independent of speech. However, the historical evidence also suggests that people frequently talked and signed at the same time, even when the spoken language could not be understood by the listener. This implies that Sign Talk became part of a person's overall linguistic repertoire, a resource available for use with or without speech in multiple communicative situations, and not merely a substitute for speech limited to inter-tribal contexts. Today, I find the degree to which PST signs combine to create discursive strings that work independently of speech varies significantly according to the knowledge, skill and personal preference of the speaker, as well as the social context.

Not surprisingly, these integrated vocal/visual-kinetic linguistic practices on the Plains are supported by an indigenous language ideology that classifies both types of linguistic signs as 'talking'. For Nakota speakers, with whom I have done most of my research, speech acts are both vocal and manual, and there is no hierarchy of preference involved (see Farnell 1995: 4). In this paper I take this indigenous position as a fruitful starting point for analysis and investigate how the two modalities function together instead of separating the two as being somehow different in kind as 'verbal' and 'non-verbal'.

Metaphors We Move By

Benjamin Lee Whorf, the famous American linguistic anthropologist, said of English speakers,

We are more apt to make a grasping gesture when we speak of grasping an elusive idea than when we speak of grasping a door knob (Whorf 1956: 157).

In identifying spatialized metaphors as an organizing principle in English and other European languages, Whorf notes the way gestures integrate with such spoken metaphors. English, he observed, is a language that systematically turns abstract concepts about intangible matters such as 'time' or 'ideas' into nouns, which then are handled discursively as if they are tangible. Thus, we

frequently talk about ideas *as if* they are physical objects — I can 'hold several ideas at once', I might 'pass some of my ideas on to you', and I can 'twist your ideas around' and so on.⁴ As Whorf puts it,

Many of the gestures made by English speaking people serve to illustrate, by a movement in space, not a real spatial reference but one of the nonspatial references that our language handles by metaphors of imaginary space. The gesture seeks to make a metaphorical and somewhat unclear reference more clear (Whorf 1956: 157).

We see this principle at work in the first segment transcribed in Figure 1, as the American-English speaking addressor (a professor in an informal interview with two students) employs vocal signs to speak of "conceiving of a project." This is accompanied by an action sign in which she uses both hands symmetrically to make a small horizontal circle in the space just in front of her head.⁵ She repeats the same action sign in the next sentence when she says, "having an idea." The two intangible nouns — 'a project' and 'an idea' — have been metaphorically transformed into visible, tangible objects, metaphorically enclosed within the circular space circumscribed with her hands. Just as Whorf observed, she has used body movement in corporeal space to create a visual representation of two non-spatial, non-tangible referents — 'a project' and 'an idea' — that English speakers conceive of in spatialized terms.

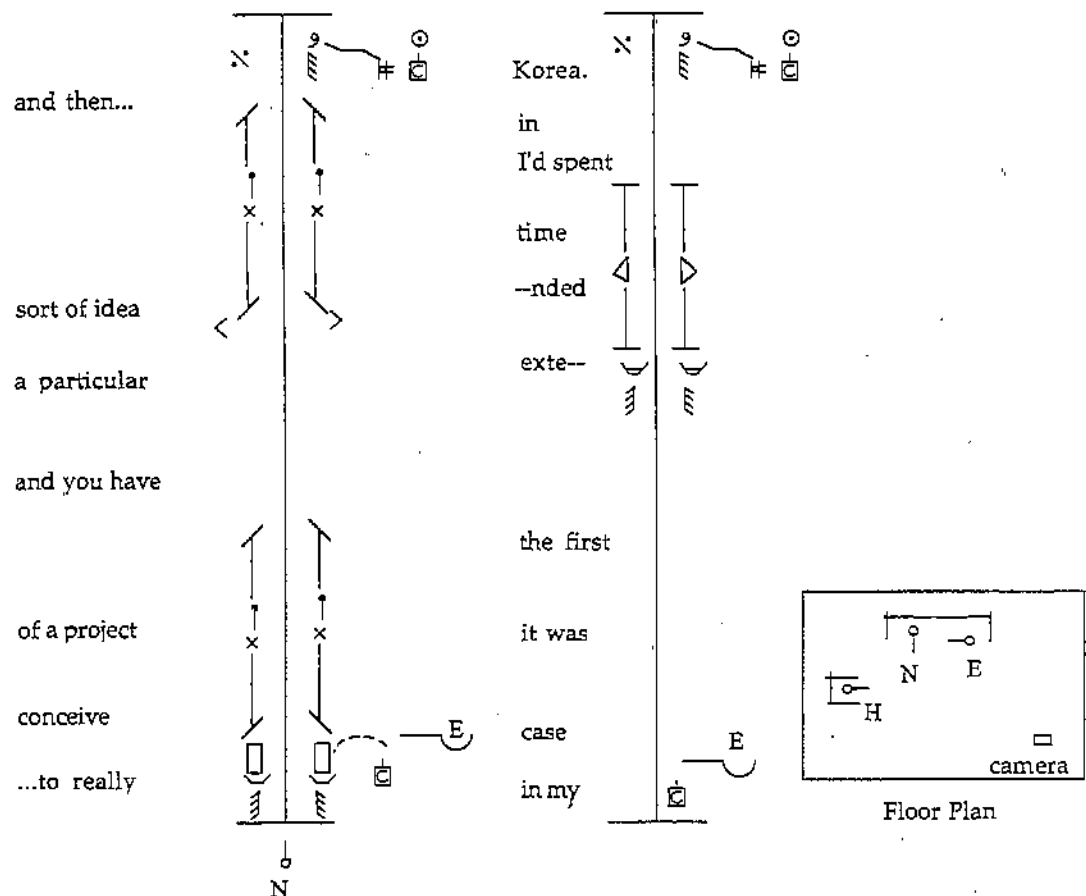


Figure 1. An American-English speaking Professor gestures as she talks informally to her students about doing field research.

In addition, the movement path of the action sign — this tracing of a circular pathway through space with both hands — is iconic of the notion of *process* involved in the verbs 'to conceive' and 'to have an idea.' The structure of the action sign thus simultaneously mirrors an English speaker's common sense meta-linguistic notion of basic language structure — that nouns are 'things' and verbs are 'doing words'. The moving hands are iconic of the verbs (to conceive, to have), while the nouns become the imaginary objects thus circumscribed (a project, an idea).

A similar integration of vocal signs and action signs happens later in the narrative when the speaker says, "fit into...your interests" (Figure 2). Her left hand becomes a metaphorical container for the intangible noun (the interests) while with her right hand she takes up the action of the verb and spatial preposition "fit into" by moving her hand back and forth as if stuffing the container with interests.

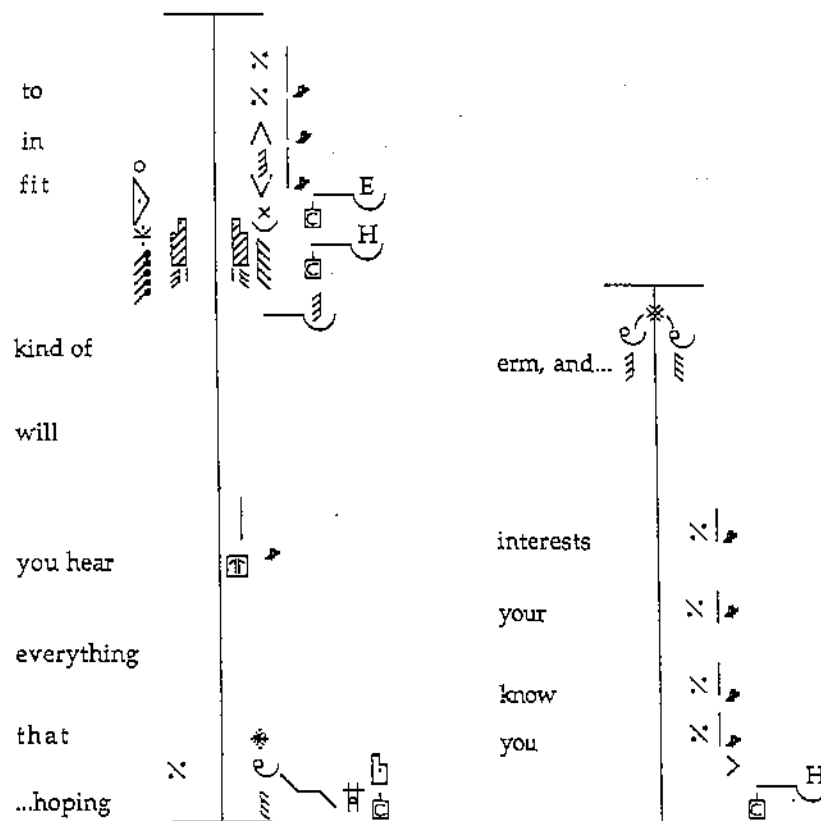


Figure 2. A Euro-American English spatialized metaphor in which vocal signs and action signs integrate to create the metaphorical vehicle.

A later phrase in the narrative illustrates how English speakers structure concepts of 'time' through spatialized metaphors. We 'objectify' time, another intangible of the experienced physical world, by using a noun form — 'the time' — to which we assign the properties of length and substance. Hence, we speak of a 'long' or 'short' time and divide its 'length' into units we call weeks, days, hours, minutes and seconds. We talk about 'not having enough time,' of spending and wasting 'it' and so forth. Consistent with this principle, the speaker uses vocal signs to say, " It was the first *extended time* I'd spent in Korea." These words are accompanied by an action sign in which she draws a horizontal line with both hands laterally across the space in front of her torso. Palms are facing each other as the hands separate, moving to left and right sides as they create a visual representation of 'time' as a length.

Semantic and Pragmatic Functions

One is led to ask why the speaker adds visual-kinetic material to the utterances and what functions these action signs serve when the words alone would seem adequate to convey the semantic content? Answers to these questions emerge if one looks at the semantic and pragmatic functions of the utterances. Since *what* is defined is only accessible through metaphor *these are not new descriptions of something previously discerned, they create the meaning*. The speaker creates the metaphorical vehicle of these spatialized metaphors within tangible space. This assists the speaker's clarity of conceptualization by making the intangible visible in the physical, corporeal space in front of her own body. She actively shapes this dynamically embodied space, acting the verbs and making the objects (nouns). This is experienced largely through her kinesthetic sense, since we don't usually watch our own gestural production (Euro-Americans usually look at co-participants, as the transcript shows). For the co-participants in this speech event, the action signs provide visual references that likewise lend support to and clarify the meaning of the spatialized metaphors. As Whorf puts it, "The gesture seeks to make a metaphorical and somewhat unclear reference more clear" (Whorf 1959: 157). The action signs thus provide visual-kinetic metaphors that complement the vocal metaphors and *vice versa*, in a semantic gestalt that functions as a pragmatic aid to both conceptualization and communication.

The Spatial Location of Gestures and Cultural Concepts of Body/Mind

An additional constituent feature of the action signs in Figure 1 is their spatial location in relation to the rest of the body. The speaker locates her action signs close to her head, thereby utilizing the English speaker's conventional notion of where in the body 'thinking' is located. It is interesting to note in passing, that signs for KNOW, THINK, UNDERSTAND, and IDEA in American Sign Language (ASL) used by the Deaf community in the United States, are also located close to the head, corresponding closely to the co-expressive actions signs employed by American English speakers (see Farnell 1995: 252). That such location is a cultural construction is well illustrated through a comparison with utterances from Nakota speech events in which a Nakota

sign talker utilizes similar metaphorical content about person attributes, but with interesting contrasts.

Figure 3 presents a short Nakota/PST utterance, "He was sitting and thinking." It could be used in any conversational context or narrative. The movement transcription records the following action signs:

- 1) The right index finger, pointing forward with the palm facing down, moves from the (left) heart side of the chest away from the body in a straight path forward [glossed in English as THINKING/ THOUGHTS].
- 2) The right hand then changes shape to make a fist and rotates 90 degrees to the right until the palm is facing sideways instead of down. This hand then moves down slightly [glossed as SITTING].

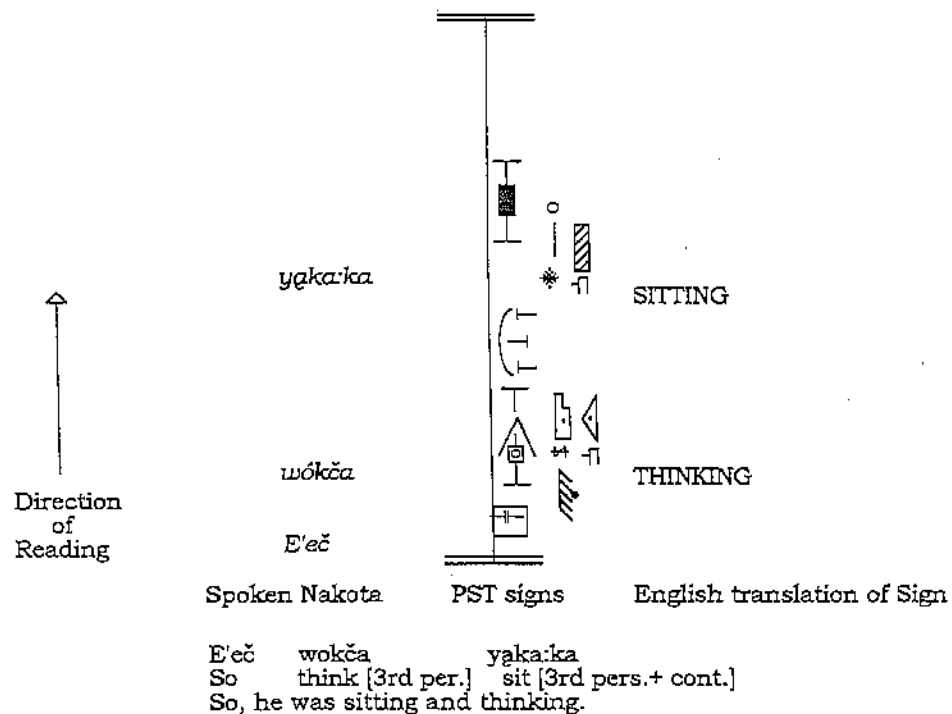


Figure 3. Integrated use of standard Plains Sign Talk and spoken Nakota.

In contrast to an English speaker's common sense conception of thinking as an individual and inwardly focused process going on privately inside the head, we see here that references to thinking in Nakota discourse — in both vocal signs and action signs — are consistently located in front of the chest. For the Nakota, thinking is conceived of as action from the heart that moves outward towards the space of social relationships. This is not unimportant in a culture where people are defined, and define themselves, fundamentally in terms of social relationships. As I have described in more detail elsewhere (Farnell 1995a: 255-257), for the Nakota, 'mind' is not a place, it is a general disposition towards others; a capacity of a whole person, and 'thinking' is an outwardly focused looking or searching. It does not take place in the head viewed as the seat of intellect and reason, separate from the rest of a sensate body — in other words, 'mind' for the Nakota is not a Cartesian ghost in the machinery of the body.

Metaphoric Manipulations

Figure 4 provides an interesting metaphoric variation of this Nakota principle in the context of a traditional Nakota 'trickster' narrative. It is Inktomi, the trickster character, who is "sitting and thinking."⁶ The narrator tells the story using PST and spoken Nakota simultaneously, and at this point in his narrative makes a creative change in the handshape of the action sign to accomplish his communicative goals. No longer an unmarked pointing index finger, the handshape now consists of the index and second fingers extended and separated to create a forked shape. Since Inktomi is doing the thinking here, the narrator creatively uses the 'forked' handshape associated with Inktomi's name sign. This is also synonymous with the sign to LIE/LIAR. The metaphor is thus polysemic: while the location of the action sign does not change and so remains metaphoric of thinking 'coming from the heart', the forked handshape is now also metaphoric of Inktomi's duplicitous thinking. Inktomi thus not only 'speaks with a forked tongue' (tells lies), but obviously thinks with one too!

Two additional kinemic components of standard PST signs have been altered to effect this metaphorical transformation.⁷ They involve a change in *location* and a change of *movement path*. In the standard PST sign INKTOMI /LIAR, the right hand is located in front of the mouth with the forked fingers pointing sideways, while the hand makes a short movement path towards the left side. In the current context, the narrator has changed the location of the standard sign from 'in front of the mouth' to 'in front of the chest' thereby switching the semantic meaning from 'talking' to 'thinking'. He has also changed the movement path of the standard INKTOMI/LIAR sign from 'sideways' to 'moving forward' in order to comply with the kinemic structure of the sign THINKING/THOUGHTS.

In addition to altering the semantic content of the action sign, the change to a forked handshape also fulfills a syntactic function. The anaphoric reference of the pronoun 'he' is ambiguous in the spoken reference, since third person in

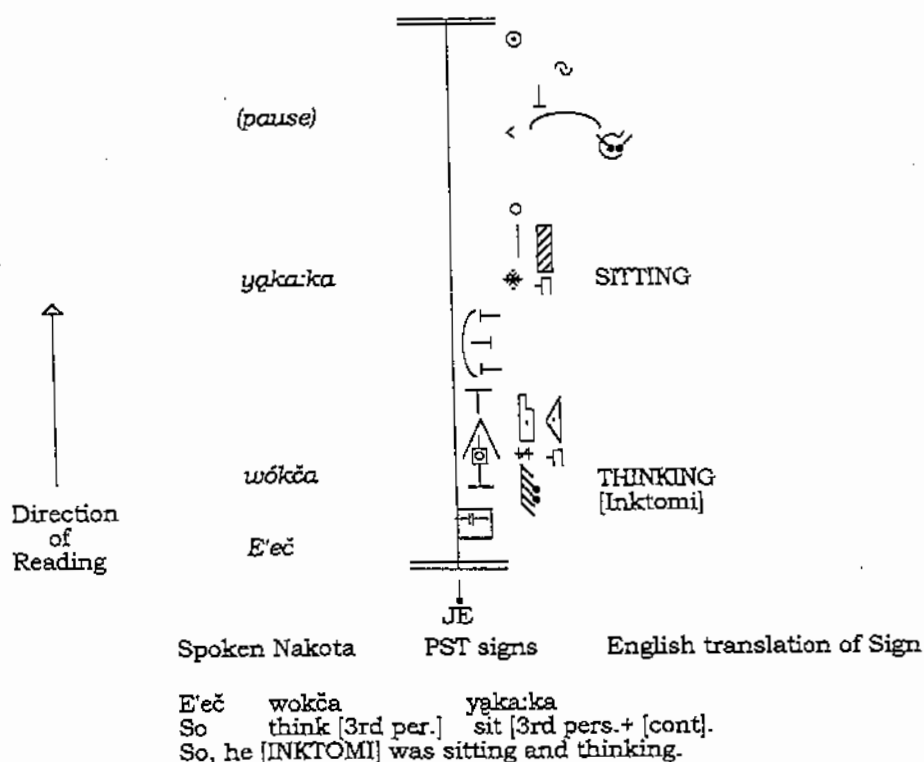




Figure 4. Metaphorical transformation of handshape kineme from  to  which identifies Inktomi as the subject. [From Inktomi and the frog make the seasons. Farnell 1995: 181.]

unmarked in Nakota (i.e. refers to either he, she or it). In substituting the handshape from Inktomi's name sign, the narrator provides an unambiguous visual reference to the subject of the sentence, thereby providing the meaning of the anaphoric reference; i.e. "So he [INKTOMI] was sitting and thinking." While the specifics here are unique to a user of PST, English speakers also frequently employ action signs to fulfill the same syntactic function. For example, I might use a pointing index finger to identify a book on the table as I say, "It's over there on the table," thereby using a visual-kinetic index to locate the anaphoric subject of the pronoun 'it'.

Like many signs in the vocabulary of Plains Sign Talk, the metaphor INKTOMI/LIAR can function as a singular unit, or in fully discursive signed utterances, with or without accompanying spoken expressions, according to context. Outside of storytelling, for example, it can be used with or without speech to mean 'you're telling a lie' (*iyąktomič*) or 'you fooled him' (*knaya*). It can also be employed in a joking fashion by either perpetrator or victim whenever a person has tricked or is trying to trick someone else, or by observers when someone is playing the fool.

A Dynamically Embodied Grammar of "I"

Later in the Euro-American English narrative, the addressor says, "I held on a little tighter to some of my own presuppositions" (Figure 5). An action sign accompanies this as she uses both hands to grasp the metaphorical 'presuppositions' and pulls them towards her chest. The 'grasping' action of the hands and the short movement path they take to touch her torso are again iconic — spatialized metaphoric vehicles that create the semantic content of the verb 'hold on' and its adverb 'a little tighter'. There is, however, an additional factor at work in this utterance that moves us from a consideration of dynamically embodied metaphorical processes to the realm of spatial and pronoun *deixis*.

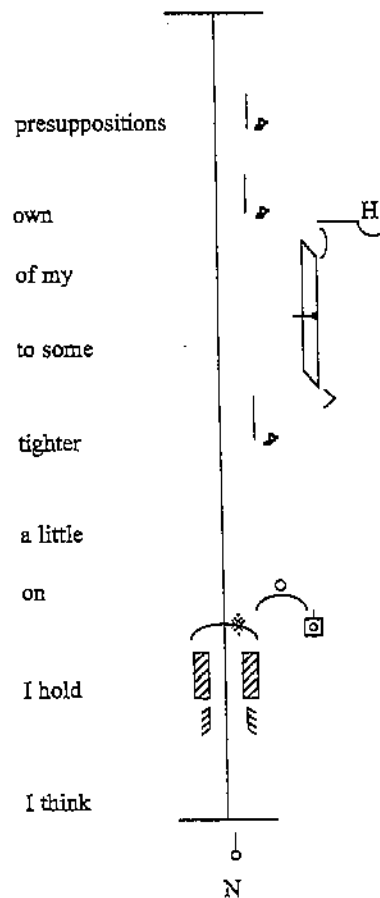


Figure 5. A Euro-American "holds onto" her "presuppositions" and illustrates the embodied spatial grammar of "I" for English speakers.

Traditional linguistic treatments of *deixis* have focused on ways in which speech acts are located in space/time. Along with tense, indexical expressions such as personal pronouns and demonstratives (e.g., 'here' and 'there'; 'now' and 'then') create spatio-temporal grids that locate persons not only in physical space-time, but also in psycho-social space-time. As Hanks puts it, "'Here' is not a place in any straightforward sense but a socially mediated field of experience, in which a vast array of knowledge is brought to bear by interactants" (1990: 28). Hanks also notes that, "The indexical foundation of deictics ... links them to the local frame in which they are used, and thereby to the bodily zones of the interlocutors." This is certainly true, but the utterances presented in this paper indicate that the "bodily zones of interlocutors" are not static spatial zones from which only *spoken* indexical reference can be achieved. Instead, they are corporeal fields of interaction that are dynamically structured, rich semiotic resources, because persons are kinesthetically at work in the production of action signs in this complementary modality.

For example, the *direction* of the movement path in the action sign transcribed in Figure 5 (movement towards the torso) acts as a constituent component of the indexical first person grammar of 'I' for an English speaker. The addressor could not have chosen to move her hands outward away from her torso, or to any other location in her corporeal space, without being *ungrammatical*, because to do so would create a disjunction between her speech and action. Since the *place* of an utterance is generally and primordially the location of the embodied speaker, the indexical reference of the first person and the uniqueness of human embodiment are intimately related.⁶ The meaning of 'I' is completed on any occasion of use by local knowledge of the location of the body of the speaker. Indeed, the very possibility of all spatio-temporal indexing depends on the fact that speakers are embodied, as Hanks emphasized.

Harré (1998: 187) also notes that as a spatio-temporal index, the personal pronoun 'I' labels the speaker as an embodied person with a location in space and time relative to the location of the speaker and moment of utterance. Thus, when the addressor in Figure 5 pulls her 'pre-suppositions' towards her own center of embodied action, her action sign too becomes a part of the indexical grammar of 'I'. 'I' also indexes the utterance with the person who is to be held responsible for its illocutionary force and its perlocutionary effect. In English, this is the speaker, unless the context is a theatrical performance, or a quotation.

In the following neglected passage, the American pragmatist William James presents a remarkable account of indexical aspects of the sense we have of our own material embodiment:

The world experienced comes at all times with our body at its center, center of vision, center of action, center of interest. Where the body is, is 'here' when the body acts is 'now'; what the body touches is 'this'; all other things are 'there' and 'then' and 'that'. These words of emphasized position imply a systematization of things with reference to the focus of action and interest which lies in the body ... the body is the storm center, the origin of co-

ordinates. ...Everything circles round it and is experienced from its point of view. The word 'I' then is primarily a noun of position, just like 'this' and 'here' (James 1977: 187 cited in Harré 1998).

'I' thus acts as an indexical used "to express one's sense of the singularity of oneself, as a person, in several dimensions certainly, but particularly with respect to the singularity of one's material embodiment" (Harré 1998: 187). This is true for English speakers certainly, but it opens up interesting questions about the corporeal and spatial components of the grammar of 'I' in linguistic communities that do not adhere to the Western concept of a singular self. Space does not permit me to elaborate further, except to say that in addition to this example of pronoun *deixis*, spatial and temporal *deixis* are also constituted by, and integrate with, dynamic action in semantically rich spaces: in all cases *body movement provides spatial points of reference for linguistic predicates*.

Summary

In these brief utterances, we have seen that for the American-English speaker the function of the simultaneous production of action signs and vocal signs is to create and clarify the meanings of spatialized metaphors and pronoun deictics. For the Nakota/signtalker, the simultaneous production provides creative contrastive resources for a visual poetics, in addition to serving a syntactic function related to anaphoric pronouns. Although Nakota does not employ spatialized metaphors to 'objectify' the intangible as English does, metaphors are created and utilized by this narrator in his creative manipulation of the kinemic structure of PST signs.

Both actors make visible their respective cultural conceptions of mind and person by structuring the corporeal space in front of their bodies. For the Nakota sign talker, the action signs confirm these classifications of the body and associated cultural values in ways that are *not* evident from the spoken signs. This contrasts with the English speaker, for whom the spatialized metaphors actually *structure* the semantics of the spoken component.

It is plausible to suggest that the kind of kinemic shift which changes the meaning and function of the utterance utilized here by the Nakota sign talker, might not be available to the English speaker. The contrastive units in her gestures may not be as conventionalized as they are for the PST user, and therefore less available as a resource for play within a visual poetics. As the analysis shows, however, the English speaker's gestures are far from being idiosyncratic in form or meaning. On the contrary, they are highly conventional, being constitutive of how English speakers conceptualize spatialized metaphors and construct and locate person attributes.

There are also important contrasts in the structure of the inter-subjective performance spaces that can only be mentioned here. For example, the Nakota sign-talking space is syntactically and semantically organized according to a shared constant frame of spatial reference based upon the four cardinal directions (see Farnell 1995a). The space of interaction used by the American-English professor and her students is structured by an actor-centered frame of

reference organized by a shared understanding of the metaphorical location of person attributes and time used by speakers of English.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has provided an introductory sample of ways in which American English speakers and Nakota speaker/sign-talkers, consistently and systematically integrate vocal signs with action signs to create dynamically embodied speech acts in socially constructed, inter-subjective, corporeal space. The analysis explored what happens if we abandon the traditional Western ideology of language as 'verbal' with its Cartesian metaphysics (and colonialist consequences), and talk instead from an embodied conception of language such as that shared by the Nakota and other Plains peoples. From this perspective, linguistic practices are not verbal utterances located internal to the mind, and, at best, supported (or, as is sometimes supposed, contradicted) by non-verbal outward behaviors of the body, but rather dynamically embodied signifying acts that simultaneously integrate vocal signs and action signs, both of which constitute 'talking'.

Traditional approaches to language (including metaphor and *deixis*) have failed to see this vocal/visual-kinetic integration at work in the performance of communicative acts. The 'breakthrough to performance' initiated by Hymes' 'ethnography of speaking' in the 1970's sparked a rich tradition of ethnographic work on the enormous diversity of spoken language practices in many societies around the world. A poetics of sound in performance was also called for and included in investigations (e.g. Tedlock 1983). However, for the most part, such work has failed to take into account the visual-kinetic aspects of performance, despite Hymes' programmatic statement cited in the epigraph to this paper. The dominant language ideology that segregates spoken signs and visual-kinetic action signs has remained unchallenged.

It is precisely here that the influence of literacy becomes crucial. Lacking an adequate technology for the transcription of movement, it has been assumed that only the stream of sounds is conceptual, structured into a conventional symbolic system, constituted by duality of patterning and ordered by syntactic structure. In contrast, bodily movements in corporeal space have been classified in oppositional terms as non/pre-conceptual, idiosyncratic (or conversely, universal because 'natural'), lacking in segmentary structure and without syntactic form. The comparatively recent emergence of a viable 'alphabetic' script for writing body movement (Labanotation) has enabled contemporary investigators in the anthropology of human movement to subject the stream of visible action to the kind of rigorous treatment traditionally afforded only spoken language texts. Our concept of segmentary structure is closely tied to modes of literacy, whether in relation to speech, music or movement. Once transcribed, duality of patterning in manual gestures becomes evident in the contrastive units formed by handshape, hand orientation, location and movement paths through corporeal space.

It is also frequently argued that gestures are 'non-verbal' since they do not occur in discursive strings. This view assumes a separation of two modalities that does not occur in performance and distorts the fundamentally bi-modal nature of discursive practices. Since the action signs in co-expressive gestural systems are not intended to stand alone, they do not need to take on the linear syntactic properties of speech. Their function is to work *with* spoken signs to fulfill a variety of conceptual and communicative functions, as I have tried to show. If this gestalt is torn apart, however, and the action sign component scrutinized for structural properties of language conceived of as '*la langue*' without '*la parole*' (something Saussure never intended), then we fall into a conventional rhetoric of deficiency that labels such action signs as 'non-linguistic'. To continue segregating vocal signs and action signs into 'verbal' and 'non-verbal' categories on the basis of modality (i.e. sound versus bodily movement) is to perpetuate a disembodied view of linguistic practices along Cartesian lines.

'Ways of speaking/signing' will no doubt differ markedly across cultural and linguistic boundaries, as do 'ways of speaking', given different speech communities and communicative situations (Hymes 1971). What they will have in common is a dynamically embodied bi-modality of the kind illustrated here and readily observable in discursive practices everywhere. The empirical facts suggest that human beings employ vocal signs (speech, song, wailing, chanting) and action signs (gestures, postures, facial expressions, gaze, spatial orientation) in ways that make sound and movement continuous. To date, however, the enormous potential for interesting cross-cultural studies of variation awaits exploration. Paraphrasing Whorf, one might begin by saying that Plains sign-talkers are more apt to make a grasping gesture when speaking of grasping a door knob since they would not conceive of 'grasping an elusive idea'.

Endnotes:

¹ See, for example, McNeill 1992 and 2000, whose cognitive psychological approach to speech and gesture leads him to formulate identity criteria that characterize gesture in terms oppositional to speech. This Cartesianism compromises McNeill's pioneering theoretical efforts to explain how both speech and gesture are components of language. See review of McNeill (ed.) 2000 in this issue, page 239ff.

² Space does not permit further exegesis of this important theoretical grounding. See Farnell (2000) for further explanation and references.

³ 'Action sign' is a technical term from semasiology (see Williams 1982). It refers to a unit of movement within a particular system that is recognized as such by its users. Action sign systems include not only sign languages and gestural systems, but also idioms of dance, theatre, martial arts, ritual practices, sports etc.

⁴ Although spoken metaphors such as these have received linguistic attention (e.g., Lakoff and Johnson 1980), the constitutive role that body movement plays in their creation and discursive use has been largely ignored. In the later work of Lakoff (1987) and Johnson (1987), body movements are relegated to the role of sensate, pre-linguistic precursors of spoken concepts. In all cases, this kind of "talking *from* the body" does not count as language (see Farnell 1996a).

⁵ The actions signs are transcribed using a movement script called Labanotation. The graphic symbols specify which body parts are moving, dynamic relationships between them, spatial directions, and movement paths through space. The symbols are placed on a vertical staff, the centre line of which divides left and right sides of the body. Simultaneous elements appear along the horizontal axis, successive elements use the vertical axis with the flow of time going from the bottom of the page to the top. The point of view is agentic not observational — one reads as if moving oneself. See Farnell 1994; 1996b and Williams 1999 for further details.

⁶ On this occasion, the storyteller performed the narrative for the camera, in the presence of a family member and myself.

⁷ A kineme is a constituent meaningful unit of movement that combines with other such units to make up a complete action sign. Kinemes are thus similar to phonemes in spoken linguistics.

⁸ Given that the English pronoun system is comparatively impoverished in its expressive capacities, it would be interesting to compare the action sign components of languages with more complex first person plurals.

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