

# Gesture space ambiguity as conceptual integration

Schuyler Laparle  
Tilburg University

**Keywords:** gesture, multimodality, mental spaces, blending

In face-to-face interaction, speakers spatially organize discourse through gesture (Kendon 2004). Particular regions of space become meaningful through cooperative actions of participants – different topics, times, and possibilities are metaphorically placed and referred to in different locations (Azar & Özyürek 2015, McNeill 2003, McNeill et al 1993). This spatial organization can be conceptualized as mental space organization (Sweetser 2007). Speakers also gesture toward the same location when discussing *different* referents and topics, resulting in ambiguities as to what a particular region of space means. I argue that this "stacking" of multiple metaphoric objects physically enacts conceptual integration (i.e. "blending"; Fauconnier & Turner 1998).

The present work concerns gestures that contribute to discourse management and the maintenance of a social interaction. Following Bavelas et al (1992), I refer to these as interactive gestures. Nearly all interactive gestures enact a form of conceptual integration, minimally blending the real physical space between interlocutors with a metaphoric space in which a discourse is constructed via the manipulation of metaphoric objects (Wehling 2017). Though the metaphoric nature of these gestures is widely acknowledged (Cienki & Müller 2008, Müller 2017, Streeck 2009), their capacity to express conceptual integration has not been sufficiently explored. I refer to this capacity as *multimodal conceptual integration*, and consider two subtypes in this work.

In the first, counterparts of a metaphoric blend are placed, as metaphoric objects, in the same region of space. I argue that this "stacking" of metaphoric objects reinforces the conceptual link between introduced topics. This is especially apparent in cases of *contrast*, in which one set of metaphorically related concepts is contrasted with another by forming two spatially separated stacks. The second form of multimodal conceptual integration relates to the blending of a co-present interlocutor with a non-present character. In these narrative uses, the gesturer deictically refers to a co-present interlocutor in gesture as they refer to an imagined character in speech. Unlike the first, these gestures do not serve to reinforce an analogical connection between the interlocutor and character. Instead, I argue that this deictic conflation of referents serves to express the viewpoint the interlocutor is meant to take. The interlocutor is invited to experience the ongoing narration from the character's viewpoint, resulting in a complex blend of DISCOURSE SPACE and NARRATIVE SPACE.

Through four micro-analyses of gesture sequences, I demonstrate the use of interactive gesture as a tool for expressing conceptual integration in these two ways. All data comes from English-speaking dyads on American talk shows, collected using UCLA's Communication Studies Archive in collaboration with the Red Hen Lab. Relevant data was identified during a larger corpus study regarding the correlations between interactive gesture and discourse relations.

The present work contributes to our understanding of both conceptual integration and interactive gesture. First, it contributes empirically to our understanding of conceptual integration expression by presenting novel multimodal data. Second, it relates types of interactive gesture directly to types of conceptual integration, furthering established discussions of the connections between gesture and mental spaces more generally.

## References

- Azar, Z., & Özyürek, A. (2015). Discourse management: Reference tracking in speech and gesture in Turkish narratives. *Dutch Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 4(2), 222-240.
- Bavelas, J. B., Chovil, N., Lawrie, D. A., & Wade, A. (1992). Interactive gestures. *Discourse processes*, 15(4), 469–489.
- Cienki, A., & Müller, C. (2008). Metaphor, gesture, and thought. *The Cambridge handbook of metaphor and thought*, 483-501.
- Fauconnier, G. & Turner, M. (2008). *The way we think: Conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities*. Basic Books.
- Kendon, A. (2004). *Gesture: Visible action as utterance*. Cambridge University Press.
- McNeill, D. (2003). Pointing and morality in Chicago. In S. Kita (Ed.), *Pointing: Where language, culture, and cognition meet* (pp. 293–306). Psychology Press.
- McNeill, D., Cassell, J., & Levy, E. T. (1993). Abstract deixis. *Semiotica*, 95(1-2), 5–20.

- Müller, C. (2017). How recurrent gestures mean: Conventionalized contexts-of-use and embodied motivation. *Gesture*, 16(2), 277–304.
- Streeck, J. (2009). *Gesturecraft: The manu-facture of meaning*. John Benjamins Publishing.
- Sweetser, E. (2007). Looking at space to study mental spaces co-speech gesture as a crucial data source in cognitive linguistics. *Methods in cognitive linguistics*, 18, 201–224.
- Wehling, E. (2017). Discourse management gestures. *Gesture*, 16(2), 245–276.