

Use of gestures by Hul'q'umi'num' storytellers: Real and fictional spaces

Rosemary Webb (*they/them*), University of Victoria | Donna Gerdts, Simon Fraser University

Storytellers in Hul'q'umi'num' (Salish, British Columbia) make extensive use of gestures during narratives. Based on our archive of videos (coded in ELAN (2021)), discussions with storytellers, and observing performances, we have studied how speakers of Hul'q'umi'num' utilize the physical space around them to convey locational and referential meanings. This paper addresses two key questions: (1) how do gestures connect to the **real-world space** that the speaker exists in? (2) how do gestures connect to the **fictional space** constructed in narratives? We use both text-first and video-first methods, presenting examples with video clips. Transcripts are flagged for uses of place names or demonstratives (*this, that, there*), and the video is then checked for any corresponding gestures such as pointing (Reisinger & Huijsmans 2021). Gestures are coded in ELAN for such features as which hand(s) are active, and which sides of the body or direction the gesture occurs on or towards. We summarize our results with diagrams that illustrate how speakers use gesture space to map the real-world and fictional spaces referred to in the narratives.

When talking about **real-world spaces**, speakers' gestures may reflect their placement in these locations and convey information about their surroundings (cf. Haviland 2010). In some stories by one speaker, she was facing south, and so gestures to locations east of her are done with her left hand or on her left side, whereas gestures to the west are with her right hand or on her right side. These locations can then serve as anchor points for character actions and movements throughout the narratives (Emmorey et al. 2000; Perniss 2012). Cardinality aligned gesture mapping is a relatively understudied co-speech gesture phenomenon; we find multiple Hul'q'umi'num' speakers use this strategy.



Gesture L/east to Cowichan Bay



Gesture R/west to Cowichan Lake

Even when speakers are referring to **fictional spaces** rather than real-world spaces, they may utilize similar left-right splits of gesture space to indicate contrast for in-story locations; this technique is also used in signed languages (Mather & Winston 1998; Winston 1995). For example, in one story, the protagonists' location is set up on the speaker's left side, while the antagonist and his setting are on the right side. We have observed several speakers setting up a story location one side even when there is no contrasting referent on the other side. Assigning a referent to a side of gesture space can indicate the importance of that referent to the narrative. Speakers then gesture on these sides of their bodies or in these directions, using their hands or eye gaze, when talking about these characters or settings (Earis & Cormier 2013; Koike 2001; Sweetser & Stec 2016).

Analyzing Elders' gestures has revealed that L1 Hul'q'umi'num' speakers have a certain style of when and how they gesture. Structuring the physical space with these spatial techniques allow the speaker to express additional gestural cues to listeners, indicating which referents listeners should focus on. Learning about gestures assists L2 speakers in their goal to become better storytellers (Claxton 2020). Gestures are an important tool that teachers can use to convey meaning in an entertaining and traditional way (Dargue & Sweller 2020; Stewart 2019). Thus, our research aids the community's revitalization efforts as well as adding to the cross-linguistic research on co-speech gestures.

References

Use of gestures by Hul'q'umi'num' storytellers: Real and fictional spaces

Rosemary Webb (*they/them*), University of Victoria | Donna Gerdts, Simon Fraser University

- Claxton, R. A. 2020. *lhwet tse' xwi'em'?' hwi' 'een'thu tse'*. *How I learned to perform a Hul'q'umi'num' story*. Simon Fraser University.
- Dargue, N., & Sweller, N. 2020. Two hands and a tale: When gestures benefit adult narrative comprehension. *Learning and Instruction*, 68.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2020.101331>
- Earis, H., & Cormier, K. 2013. Point of view in British Sign Language and spoken English narrative discourse: the example of "The Tortoise and the Hare." *Language and Cognition*, 5(4), 313–343. <https://doi.org/10.1515/langcog-2013-0021>
- ELAN (6.1). 2021. Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, The Language Archive.
<https://archive.mpi.nl/tla/elan>.
- Emmorey, K., Tversky, B., & Taylor, H. A. 2000. Using space to describe space: Perspective in speech, sign, and gesture. *Spatial Cognition and Computation*, 2, 157–180.
<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1013118114571>
- Haviland, J. B. 2010. Pointing, gesture spaces, and mental maps. In *Language and Gesture*.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511620850.003>
- Koike, C. 2001. An analysis of shifts in participation roles in Japanese storytelling in terms of prosody, gaze, and body movements. *BLS 27: General Session and Parasession on Language and Gesture*. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3765/bls.v27i1.3418>
- Mather, S., & Winston, E. A. 1998. Spatial mapping and involvement in ASL storytelling. In C. Lucas (Ed.), *Pinky Extension and Eye Gaze: Language Use in Deaf Communities* (pp. 183–210). Gallaudet University Press.
- Perniss, P. 2012. Use of sign space. In R. Pfau, M. Steinbach, & B. Woll (Eds.), *Sign Language: an International Handbook* (pp. 412–431). De Gruyter, Inc.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110261325.412>
- Reisinger, D. K. E., & Huijsmans, M. 2021. Demonstratives in ʔayʔajuθəm. In D. K. E. Reisinger, H. Green, L. Griffin, M. Huijsmans, G. Mellesmoen, & B. Trotter (Eds.), *Papers for the International Conference on Salish and Neighboring Languages* 56. (pp. 305–375).
- Stewart, M. 2019. *Move to Improve: A Second Language Acquisition Method to support the teacher and the learner of Upriver Halq'eméylem*. Simon Fraser University.
- Sweetser, E., & Stec, K. 2016. Maintaining multiple viewpoints with gaze. In B. Dancygier, W. Lu, & A. Verhagen (Eds.), *Viewpoint and the Fabric of Meaning: Form and Use of Viewpoint Tools across Languages and Modalities* (pp. 237–257). De Gruyter Mouton.
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/306040019>
- Winston, E. A. 1995. Spatial mapping in comparative discourse frames. In K. Emmorey & J. S. Reilly (Eds.), *Language, gesture, and space* (pp. 87–114). Psychology Press.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203773413>