Managing multiple viewpoints:
Coordinating embedded perspective in multi-modal narratives

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Linguistic and narratological descriptions of the coordination of multiple viewpoints often focus on embedded representational structures, such as the difference between reported speech or thought and free indirect discourse (e.g. Sanders and Redeker 1996; Dancygier 2012). Gestural descriptions often look to spatial frames of reference, and how the expression of gestural viewpoint is affected by their combination (e.g. Perniss and Özyürek, 2011). But more options for embedded viewpoint are possible, especially if we widen the scope of inquiry to include spontaneous multi-modal narratives and the representation of embedded mental space structures (Fauconnier 1997) in speech and co-speech gesture.

Looking at our dataset, we find that an embedded "mixed viewpoint" occurs both within and across modalities: although speech may show linguistic markers of viewpoint embedding, speech may also indicate maintenance of one viewpoint while co-speech gesture indicates maintenance of a different viewpoint. We investigate this phenomenon of mixed viewpoint, defined as instances where different mental spaces are simultaneously activated by different modalities, by using a dataset which consists of video-recorded English autobiographical narratives told between pairs of friends. This use of naturalistic data enables an investigation of embedded viewpoint "in the wild" (cf. Hutchins 1996), and overcomes limitations in previous work which was either modality-specific or constrained by experimental design.

We find that even though a narrative may itself be complex and rich with embedded viewpoint structure, the accompanying co-speech gestures exhibit an equally complex, and often very different, viewpoint structure. For example, in one segment we see a narrator holding a gesture associated with one mental space (narrative) even as she changes her body orientation and elaborates another mental space in speech (speaker-addressee interaction) – all while continuing to hold that first gesture. In this example, the maintenance of the narrative gesture indicates the speaker's intention to return to the narrative space and continue elaborating it. Here, speech alone suggests the activation of one mental space (interaction), but looking to the complete multi-modal utterance, we see that not only are multiple mental spaces active (interaction in speech; narrative in gesture), they are active in different ways: one foregrounded (interaction), the other backgrounded (narrative), even though both are perceptually present.

Our contribution to this special session on mixed points of view will focus on cases like this, where viewpoint multiplicity is distributed across modalities. Topics addressed include the combination of mental spaces seen in our corpus, as well as the means by which those mental spaces are activated or maintained (e.g. gesture, body orientation, different linguistic markers, etc.). We draw on both mental spaces (Fauconnier 1997) and conceptual integration (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002) to explain how mixed multi-modal viewpoint is possible, and provide a typology of the combinations seen in our corpus.

References
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