Sign + gesture = speech + gesture? Comparing aspects of simultaneity in Flemish sign language to instances of concurrent speech and gesture

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Abstract
This presentation explores the possible parallels between different forms of manual simultaneous constructions in sign languages and concurrent speech and gesture in spoken languages. One example is the use of pointing signs/gestures: a signer producing a pointing sign with one hand while the other hand articulates a series of other signs as compared to a speaker using co-speech pointing gestures. From the gesture research it becomes clear that gestures are an integral part of linguistic communication. Apparently, speakers must gesture when they speak and they primarily use the manual channel to do so. In sign languages, 'speech' moves from the mouth to the hands. In theory four possibilities arise from this: (1) gesture disappears, (2) gesture and 'speech' trade places, resulting in the manual articulators producing the linguistic component and the mouth producing the gestural component of a message, (3) gesture and sign become integrated, (4) gesture and sign co-exist in the manual modality. Both in the gesture literature and the sign linguistics literature, the general idea seems to be that in sign languages, gesture either moves away from the manual channel and/or (partly) loses its true gestural character and becomes part of or integrated in the linguistic system. Both options are discussed in this presentation. However, we also explore the possible presence of ('non-integrated') gesture in the manual production of signers. This issue is approached by a comparison of (1) simultaneous constructions in signed languages, as exemplified by Flemish Sign Language, with (2) various, possibly comparable, types of speech combined with gesture. This comparison reveals many more similarities than we had expected, both in form and function, and invites to re-examine gesture in sign languages.