Iconic performances: The combined meaning contributions of ideophones and gestures

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The research to be presented in this poster is an initial formal semantic analysis of iconic performances involving combinations of ideophones and iconic gestures based the approach of Ebert, Ebert & Hörnig (2020) and Ebert & Barnes (in draft).

While in recent years researchers such as Ebert, Ebert & Hörnig (2020), Esipova (2019) and Schlenker (2018) have proposed semantic analyses of the meaning contributions of iconic gestures and Ebert & Barnes (in draft), Henderson (2016) and Kawahara (2020) have provided formal semantic analyses of ideophones in German, Tseltal and Japanese; there has to date been no research into the combined meaning contributions of ideophones and gestures. Dingemanse (2012) has, however, argued that ideophones and iconic gestures form two parts of one multimodal iconic performance, with the speaker using both modalities in order to maximise the iconic potential of the performance and both Dingemanse (2015) and Nuckolls (2019) have shown evidence that gestures appear to contribute additional information on top of the ideophone.

In this account, I follow Ebert, Ebert & Hörnig (2020) and Ebert & Barnes (in draft) and assume that the lexical meaning of ideophones and gestures are references to events and individuals respectively. When an ideophone and a gesture co-occur, the ideophone makes a not-at-issue contribution that the event it refers to is similar in the relevant dimensions to the event described by the main utterance. The gesture refers to a salient individual somehow involved in the event that the ideophone references and contributes the not-at-issue information that the salient individual it references is similar in the revelant dimensions to an individual described by the main utterance.

To further illustrate this analysis, I apply the approach to the following example elicited by Dingemanse (2015, p.219) during fiedlwork on Siwu. In this example, the participant performed a gesture described as "right hand flat, moves from upper right down to alongside body depicting flow of water" (p.219).

(1)   The water goes [ɣááá]_GUSHING

Here, due it being used predicatively, the ideophone necessarily makes an at-issue contribution desrcibing some sort of gushing event (cf. Barnes et al. (conditionally accepted) and Ebert & Barnes (in draft)). It also makes a second not-at-issue contribution that there is an event which is iconically depicted by the ideophone *ɣááá* and is similar to the gushing event in the relevant dimensions. The gesture on the other hand refers to an individual involved in the event referred to by the ideophone and iconically depicts its path; it therefore makes the not-at-issue contribute that this movement of the individual is similar to the movement of the water in the gushing event.

This is shown formally for (1) in (2):

(2) $[e] \wedge \mathrm{agent}(e, water) \wedge$ goes $\mathrm{woosh}_p(e) \wedge [e'] \wedge [z] \wedge z = g \wedge \mathrm{agent}(e', z) \wedge \mathrm{woosh}_{p^*}(e') \wedge SIM_{p^*}(e, e') \wedge SIM_{p^*}(water, g)$

The gesture therefore contributes additional information about the path of the water and could potentially include further information such as manner or speed. As such then, iconic performances with ideophones and gestures seem to allow speakers to not only give multisensory information about the described events through the spoken modality, but to enhance this depiction by using the visual medium to give additional information about said event which is not already encoded in the ideophone. As Dingemanse (2013) notes, this makes the most of the ideophone's iconic potential and allows speakers to give a more embellished performance of the event they are discussing.

Nevertheless, while ideophones appear to combine with gestures in a different manner to standard arbitrary items, the combination of two iconic components does not seem to impact the at-issue status of the co-speech gesture, which remains not-at-issue. This can also be seen in attempting to deny the gesture contribution in (3), taken from Dingemanse (2015) where the gesture is described as "both hands flat, palm down, moving and meandering horizontally while body is turning" (p. 219):

(3)   A: It just goes [ɣáǎá]_GUSHING
       B: No, that's not true, the water was moving quite slowly.
       B: # No, that's not true, the water went straight past.

It seems that the gesture behaves as a normal co-speech gesture; it is not at-issue and cannot be targeted by a direct denial. In this case then, the combination of gesture and ideophone does not appear to be able to shift the gesture towards at-issue status.

This preliminary analysis provides a basis from which we can begin to formalise the meaning contributions of iconic performances containing multiple iconic enrichments. There are however many remaining questions and as such, I propose to conduct a production study on ideophones and gestures in order to be able to systematically review the combined meaning contributions of ideophone and iconic gestures, including how the syntactic category and integration of the ideophone affects the at-issue status of both it and the accompanying gesture. I would hope to have initial data from this study to present alongside the theoretical analysis at the PerForum workshop.

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