

# Multimodal quotation: Role shift practices in spoken narratives



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## Abstract

This study investigates how speakers of American English use multimodal articulation when quoting characters in personal narratives. We use the concept of *role shift*, adapted from signed languages, where it refers to a device used to represent one or more characters with one or more bodily articulators, to describe multimodal role shift practices. In a regression analysis, four bodily articulators were found to predict the impression of a *role shift*: character intonation, character facial expressions, character viewpoint gestures, and changes in body orientation; gaze was not a significant predictor. Most of the 704 quotes in our data are accompanied by activation of two or three articulators (55.3%) and very few (2.6%) occur without any of the articulators we have annotated. The extent of multimodal articulation depends on the type of quoted utterance: quotations of actual, witnessed speech events tend to garner fewer articulators than constructed ('fictive interaction') quotations. These findings demonstrate that speakers, like signers, use a range of bodily articulators when they take on another's role in quotation and thus underpin the importance of investigating the systematic use of the visual modality in quotation and, more generally, in ordinary interaction.

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## 1. Introduction

For a long time, the investigation of multimodal communication focussed almost exclusively on manual gestures. Although this has changed dramatically in the past couple of decades, the use and interplay of bodily resources is still not well understood. Particularly active and varied use of multimodal articulation has been attested for quotations (e.g., [Clark and Gerrig, 1990](#); [Earis and Cormier, 2013](#); [Blackwell et al., 2015](#)), which therefore provide a fruitful testing ground for this research. This study aims to contribute qualitative and quantitative empirical evidence for the ways in which speakers of American English use their body to represent or enact quoted characters in personal narratives. To reach beyond the linguistic and visual description of the quotations, we draw a parallel to *role shift*, a representational device used in many signed languages for representing the utterances, thoughts, feelings and/or actions of one or more referents with one or more bodily articulators, including the head, face, gaze, hands, arms and torso ([Cormier et al., 2015:1](#)).

To illustrate the extent to which multiple bodily articulators co-occur, consider the following excerpt, Transcript 1, [Fig. 1](#), taken from a narrative about the first time Pink (on the left in the figure) went to a concert with her friends. At the venue, Pink took a nap during the opening acts (line 1) and describes how her friends woke her up (lines 2–4) so that she can go to

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Fig. 1. Stills from Concert.

## Transcript 1: Concert

1 Pink: and I like (0.2) took a nap to it upstairs  
 2 and then my friends like the next thing I know  
 3 [friends] they're like *hey hey we're going to go downstairs now*  
 4 *the show's going to start* (h)  
 5 [past.self]and I'm like *whoa*

the main act. Throughout this paper, quoted utterances are formatted as follows: Speaker\_Name: [quoted.speaker] *quote*, and image numbers corresponds to the line number(s) in the transcript. In this example Pink, a native American English speaker, quotes her friends (lines 3–4) and then her past self (line 5).

Linguistically, quotations are indicated by pronoun choice, verb choice, marked changes in syntax, etc. (see Parrill, 2012, for a review) – but they may also be co-articulated with certain multimodal actions (see, e.g. Park, 2009, or Stec et al., 2015). To illustrate, in the example given above, the speaker first enacts her friends (lines 3–4 of Transcript 1, Fig. 1, Image 3) by orienting her body to her left and using her left hand to poke at empty space, showing Black, Pink's interlocutor, how Pink's friends woke her up from a nap before the main act began at the concert. Co-timed with Pink's manual gesture is a facial portrayal which makes use of wide, alert eyes to show how earnest her friends were. Following this, Pink produces her past self's response (line 5 of Transcript 1, Fig. 1, Image 5) which is co-timed with the following multimodal actions: Pink re-orientes her head to the upper right while simultaneously showing her surprise at being woken up. Both utterances are accompanied by special intonation which is evocative of Pink's friends and her past self.

This excerpt exemplifies the complex interaction of a variety of verbal and visual means with which speakers mimetically (Donald, 2001; Redeker, 1991) or iconically (Vigliocco et al., 2014) demonstrate selected aspects of the quoted utterances. Pink quotes a past interaction in such a way as to demonstrate what the speakers sounded like, what emotions they felt, and what their physical interaction looked like. In this way, we see Pink fluidly use a range of complementary, multimodal means to enact quoted characters using different parts of her own body.

### 1.1. Direct quotation

Direct quotations are pervasive in narratives. By shifting the viewpoint to a character, they create involvement (Tannen, 1989) by dramatizing interaction (Labov, 1972; Redeker, 1991), add liveliness (Groenewold et al., 2014; Sanders and Redeker, 1996), and recruit neural structures in the listener which indicate more simulation of the quoted speaker (Yao et al., 2011, 2012). Direct quotations are usually not literal renditions of the quoted utterances, but *demonstrate* (Clark and Gerrig, 1990) or *depict* (Clark, 2016) selected aspects of them. They do not even have to be *enactments* (Goodwin, 1990) or *reenactments* (Sidnell, 2006) of an actual previous utterance or situation, but can be made up by the quoting speaker to illustrate, e.g., a character's reaction or a discussant's stance in a real or imagined debate. Such quotations have been called *constructed dialogues* (Tannen, 1989), *constructed quotations* (Redeker, 1991), or *fictive interaction* (Pascual, 2014), and are typically used in a functionally distinct way, i.e. to voice a character's thoughts, an entity which cannot speak, or to refer to a future, pretend or counterfactual scenario (see Pascual, 2014). We will use the term *fictive interaction* because of its widespread use, and will contrast it with direct quotation of actually witnessed speech events.

Most research on the communicative functions of multimodal utterances in speaking communities has focused exclusively on contributions made by the hands (e.g., Kendon, 2004; McNeill, 1992, 2005), especially on the difference between character and observer viewpoint gestures, and the different situations in which they occur (e.g., Brown, 2008; Özyürek, 2002; Parrill, 2010). But as Transcript 1 shows, speakers also frequently use other bodily resources.

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