Quite a Mouthful

The Influence of Language Contact on Speech Act Verbs in Sign Language of the Netherlands and ASL

Cornelia Loos
Universiteit van Amsterdam
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Speech act verbs?

→ verbs that denote linguistic actions or aspects of their performance: e.g. scold, flatter, advise, whisper

→ 'speech' refers to language use independent of the modality that implements it

→ oral verb: SAV whose form references oral speech iconically
Outline

1. Description of oral verbs: frequency and indexing strategies
2. Correlation between oral verbs and 'typical' SAVs
3. Oral verbs as a result of language contact
Corpora

for NGT: Standaard Lexicon Nederlandse Gebarentaal, Online Straattaal in NGT, online version of the Van Dale Basiswoordenboek Nederlandse Gebarentaal, NGT teaching materials (level two and four) on DVD, to complement: translation of Dutch SAVs from Verschueren (1985) by Marijke Scheffener

## 1.1 Frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oral verbs</th>
<th>Absolute numbers</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NGT</td>
<td>41 (out of 92)</td>
<td>44.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASL</td>
<td>21 (out of 83)</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compare manual verbs: 9 (9.8%) in NGT and 6 (7.2%) in ASL
1.2 Metonymic and metaphorical representations of oral speech

2.1 Metonymies

(MOVEMENT OF THE) MOUTH FOR ORAL SPEECH

RANT&RAGE (NGT)

BABBLE (ASL)
1.2. Metonymic and metaphorical representations of oral speech

2.1 Metonymies

(MOVEMENT OF THE) TONGUE FOR ORAL SPEECH

CHAT/CHATTER (NGT)  BABBLE2 (ASL)
1.2 Metonymic and metaphorical representations of oral speech

2.2 Metaphors
THE MOUTH IS A CONTAINER & UTTERANCE/IDEAS ARE OBJECTS

ANSWER (NGT)
ANNOUNCE (NGT)
ANNOUNCE/DECLARE (ASL)
BLAB (ASL)
1.2 Metonymic and metaphorical representations of oral speech

2.2 Metaphors
THE MOUTH IS A CONTAINER & UTTERANCE/IDEAS ARE OBJECTS

BE-SILENT (NGT)

SHUT-UP (ASL)
2. Oral verbs and typical SAVs

Typicality as strength of association with linguistic action:

1. SAVs whose sole meaning is:
   • to use language/to express in language (SAY, SPEAK)
   • linguistic non-action (BE-SILENT)
   • manner-of-speech verbs (WHISPER)

2. SAVs whose sole illocutionary purpose is information transfer (INFORM, ANNOUNCE)

3. SAVs that are necessarily performed as linguistic actions but do not fall under any of the other classes.

4. SAVs where:
   • linguistic action is optional but salient (THANK, CONVINCE)
   • linguistic action is one of several action components, salient (CHRISTEN)
   • polysemous verbs that denote both a linguistic action and a non-linguistic one (BLAME)
2. Results: Oral verbs and typical SAVs

Table 1. Percentages of SAVs and oral verbs per classes in NGT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NGT</th>
<th>class 1</th>
<th>class 2</th>
<th>class 3</th>
<th>class 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>percentage of SAVs per class (out of 91)</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percentage of oral verbs per class (out of 40)</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Percentages of SAVs and oral verbs per classes in ASL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASL</th>
<th>class 1</th>
<th>class 2</th>
<th>class 3</th>
<th>class 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>percentage of SAVs per class (out of 93)</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percentage of oral verbs per class (out of 24)</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Review: Oral verbs and typical SAVs

- Correlation confirmed: The more salient the linguistic nature of an SAV, the more likely it is to be an oral verb
- 'to use language'/'to express in language' = oral verbs in NGT and ASL

- Differences between ASL and NGT:
  - occurrence of oral verbs depends more on typicality in ASL. Oral verbs in NGT favour typical SAVs, but only disprefer marginal ones
  - less dependence on a salient link to language use suggests deeper entrenchment of the association of linguistic action and oral speech
We need to account for:

1. Frequency
   - at 46.6% (NGT) and 25.3% (ASL) of all SAVs a consistent source of iconicity, significantly more pervasive in NGT than ASL

2. Strategies for referencing oral speech
   - mouth and tongue metonymies tend to be represented by the hands in ASL, do not stand for themselves

3. Typicality
   - locutionary verbs are oral
   - typical SAVs tend to be oral, but the correlation is stronger in ASL
3. Oral verbs as a result of language contact

- The image of oral speech is borrowed systematically as a source of iconicity that motivates the form of SAVs:

  spoken modality $\rightarrow$ sign phonology

- Indicates primacy of spoken language as prototypical form of human communication during formational period of NGT and ASL

- Language derives status in community through power its speakers exert (Rahman 2001)

- Deafness as disability $\rightarrow$ SL not fully-fledged languages
3. Oral verbs as a result of language contact

observed differences in number and behaviour of oral verbs in NGT and ASL can partly be attributed to different attitudes towards oral speech

Schermer (1990): 51% and 74% of spontaneous conversations in NGT have spoken components

Padden (2000: 347): speaking is not an “appropriate behaviour” in American Deaf culture


Thanks!

to
Joni Oyserman, Marijke Scheffener, Lynn Hou,
Wayne Nicholson, Marla Hatrak, Sara de Visser, Richard Cokart

for their intuitions on NGT and ASL