

Read My Lips

A quick look at semiotics in sign language










Read My Lips

Intro

This book will look at the way in which semiotics works within sign languages well as how they work independently of each other. It will focus on the importance of facial expressions and the way that a lack of available emotional signifiers can alter the way in which we read signs.

Contents

-  Semiotics (an introduction)
-  BSL and alternatives (an introduction)
-  Distraction
-  Emotion
-  Modification
-  Interpretation
-  Conclusion

Semiotics

n. (Used with a sing. verb)

The theory and study of signs and symbols, especially as elements of language or other systems of communication, and comprising semantics, syntactics, and pragmatics.

Semiotics as a subject is a study of the way in which signs and signifiers work together in order to project a meaning within the environment that they are situated.

The study includes the way that signs can be misread without the relevant signifiers. For example, a clown is a clown, however a clown at a funeral projects a significantly different image and emotion to one at a child's' part. This is the subject of semiotics.

The most famous example of semiotics is René Magritte's 'ceci n'est pas une pipe' with out the signifier (ceci n'est pas une pipe) you would be lead to believe that the image is nothing more than a pipe, however with the signifier in place it is intended that you question what you see, and take different meaning out of the piece.

Sign Language

BSL and alternates

British sign language is the oldest established and official signing language, however there are a number of cultural alternatives for example ASL (American Sign Language) which offers a one handed finger spelling and ESL (Spanish Sign Language).

Facial expression

Facial expression within sign language is very important. Facial expressions offer context to the signs being shown. Facial expressions help to convey emotion, and facial emotion within sign has a strong influence on the way in which a sign is read as there are no audio clues. Without offering the correct emotion in your face it can be hard for the reader to grasp the correct meaning of the sign as all sign is interpreted dependent upon contextual signifiers in both the environment and the signers body language and facial expressions.

Emotion

Emotion within sign is represented strongly by facial expressions, offering the reader an emotional signifier that relates to the context of any conversation, without these signifiers the context of a conversation can be lost. for example when showing an extreme disgust or hatred the face will reflect this in the severity of its movement and expression.

A display of emotion in the face that does not reflect the context of the situation can lead to the reader not grasping the tone of a conversation and interperating it diferently to the way that it is intended.



DISGUST.
exaggerated to
show an extreme
emotion.

PG | SIX

Modification

Modification within sign language is the way in which a sign is altered in order to exaggerate or change the meaning of a certain action. For example if it is raining a little the sign for rain would be slow and gentle with a softer facial expression, however if it is raining more heavily the facial expression will change dramatically and the hand motions will become more vigorous.

Issues of semiotics appears in this area again, the main issue being where a lack of facial expression is present. It can be harder to decipher what the sign is conveying. However where the sign does not reflect the strength of the facial expression it can also lead to a misread sign.

HOT.
Modified to
give context to
a conversation
and adapting to
exaggerations.



Interpretation

Throughout sign language interpretation is key. Whether it is BSL, ASL or any other established signing culture it is always up to the reader to interpret context from facial expression, surroundings, exaggerations and previously established context. The interpretation of conversation for others, for example on BBC's See Hear television show, is not simply a job of signing word for word what has been said, but to also gather context from what is happening within the scene or pictures. Doing this requires the interpreter to look for visual clues or signifiers in order to obtain and relay the context of the conversation. For example, as shown if a conversation was to discuss boiling whether it would require a different interpretation to if they were talking about boiling water.

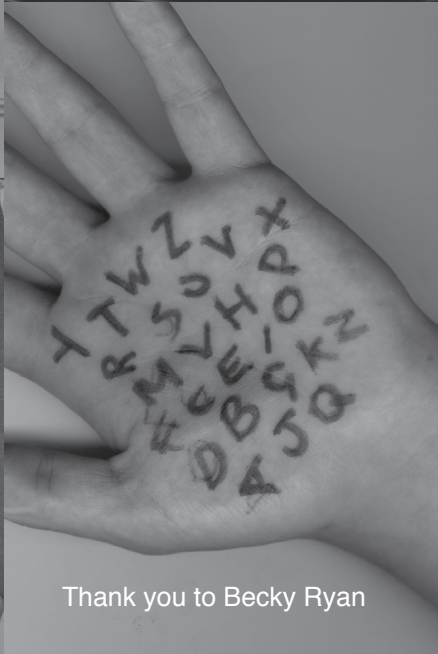


BOILING.
interpreted to
give context to a
conversation.

Conclusion

Throughout the book I have had explored the question and themes of semiotics in sign language. I have looked at ways in which sign language without certain signifiers can alter the way in which they are read.

I hope that this book has given you a better understanding of how semiotics and sign language work, both individually, as well as in relation to each other.



Thank you to Becky Ryan

Read My Lips

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