Hands with voice, with the help of metonymy

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In an important paper on metonymy, Barcelona (2012) provides evidence that metonymy is more than just a lexical phenomenon, i.e. that demonstrates its role in conceptualization, phonology, grammar and discourse-pragmatic inferencing. In short, metonymy is a conceptual mechanism (an inferential schema) operating **under the lexicon** (in phonological categorization and in the meaning and grammatical behaviour of certain morphemes), **in the lexicon**, and **above the lexicon** (motivating other grammatical phenomena, especially grammatical recategorization, and partially guiding discourse-pragmatic inferencing, especially indirect speech acts and implicatures). In light of the fact that "lexical metonymies are often at the same time grammatical and discourse metonymies" (254), we realize that metonymy is "a ubiquitous, multilevel phenomenon."

This is also in keeping with the Equipollence Hypothesis (Mairal & Ruiz de Mendoza 2009, Ruiz de Mendoza & Luzondo Oyón 2012), one of the methodological pillars of the Lexical Constructional Model (LCM), according to which cognitive and linguistic processes found to be at work in one domain of linguistic inquiry are expected to be active in other domains, too. The hypothesis could, however, be extended to apply to all modes of communication, including pictorial and visuo-kinetic modalities, the latter being an umbrella term for co-speech gestures and the signs of signed languages (Mittelberg 2019).

It is our intention in this talk, firstly, to show that, unsurprisingly, metonymy is also pervasive in signed languages (and not only in spoken/written languages) and that it occurs at several levels or layers. Secondly, we demonstrate that many of these metonymies are complex, such that the target of one feeds into another, serving as its source/vehicle (and recursively so). As a result of this, many of these metonymies remain obscured to sight and are not recognized as such. Thirdly, in the final part of our presentation we argue that a number of metonymies are (no longer) recognized as such due to reductions of an excessively structuralist approach to sign languages. This approach, which glosses over the deep (metonymic and metaphorical) motivation, may have adverse effects on the process of teaching/learning sign languages.

Keywords: sign language; metonymy; lexicon; complex metonymy; motivation.

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