

# Language and Gesture

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## 2 Language and gesture: unity or duality?

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### 1 Introduction

'Language' and 'gesture' have long been held to be different, yet at the same time a relationship between them has always been recognized. However, whether they are regarded as belonging together or not depends upon how these words are defined. Thus if, with Armstrong, Stokoe & Wilcox, we accept Studdert-Kennedy's (1987: 77) definition of 'gesture' as "an equivalence class of coordinated movements that achieve some end" (see Armstrong et al. 1995: 43), then, insofar as both speech and, let us say, gestures of the hands are comprised of "coordinated movements that achieve some end," it is possible to argue for a fundamental identity between the one and the other, as indeed they have done. On the other hand, if we insist, as some have, that a defining feature of language is that it be spoken, then this seems forever to make it impossible to see 'gesture' as part of 'language'. However, if we define language in a more abstract fashion, and allow that its medium of realization is not one of its defining features, then whether or not 'gesture' is to be seen as a part of language depends upon what other features are insisted upon. For example, if we follow Saussure's definition of language, so long as 'gestures' can be shown to be arbitrary form-meaning pairs differentiated in contrastive relationships and organized paradigmatically and syntagmatically, they can be regarded as a form of language. On these grounds, gesture systems such as primary or alternate sign languages would be included, but we might exclude such modes of expression as improvised or locally created gesturings such as may be observed in many of the gestures used concurrently with speech. On the other hand if, like William Dwight Whitney, we define language as "the means of expression of human thought" (1899: 1), which, as he goes on to say, is comprised of "certain instrumentalities whereby men consciously and with intention represent their thought, to the end, chiefly, of making it known to other men," then 'gesture' may be seen as a part of language. Indeed, Whitney is explicit on this point, since he lists among his 'instrumentalities' "gesture, grimace, pictorial or written signs, and uttered or

spoken signs." Of these, the last is, according to him, "infinitely the most important"; but of gesture he says that we make use of it "on the one hand for communication where the usual conventional means is of no avail [deaf; people with different languages] and, on the other hand, for embellishing and explaining and enforcing our ordinary language: where it is of such power and value that no student of language can afford to overlook" (p. 283).

Whitney's functional definition of 'language' is not widely followed today. For one thing, it seems to many to be too inclusive, and in his own work, of course, he himself concentrated on what he referred to as "the body of uttered and audible signs by which, in human society, thought is principally expressed." From Saussure onwards, linguists have almost always defined language in structural terms, and until the advent of studies of primary sign languages, it was almost always assumed that 'language' must be spoken to be 'language'. As a consequence, very many writers use the words 'language' and 'speech' interchangeably.

This is one of the reasons why the study of gesture in any of its forms languished for so long. Whereas at the end of the last century leading writers on language such as Edward Tylor (1865), Wilhelm Wundt (1973 [1902]), and Dwight Whitney paid serious attention to it, as the structural analysis of language became more and more important, gesture, in treatises on language, at any rate, in any of its manifestations, is mentioned less and less often. If it is mentioned at all it is usually to show that it is not very interesting and can be ignored. For example, Leonard Bloomfield, in his influential textbook *Language* (1933: 39), observes that gesture accompanies speech, and remarks that it is subject to social convention, but writes that it is "obvious" in how it functions. So far as gesture languages are concerned, these for him are little more than elaborations of what he calls "ordinary gestures," and where they are more complex than this he claims they are "based on the conventions of ordinary speech."

Some linguists have shown a more interested attitude. Bolinger (1975: 18), for example, insisted that "language is embedded in gesture," and he showed, in a paper entitled "Some Thoughts on "Yep" and "Nope"" (1946), how the boundary between what is considered 'language' and what not, is arbitrary and depends upon the extent to which the phenomena in question can be brought to order by the methodological procedures of structural analysis. Kenneth Pike, approaching the question from the perspective of his "unified theory of the structure of human behavior," insisted that language should be considered but a "phase" of human activity which should not be divorced from other "phases." In his initial and elementary demonstration of this point, in the first chapter of his major work (1967), he gives an account of a game in which the words in a sentence are progressively

replaced by gestures. In this way he shows how non-spoken forms of action can be integrated structurally with spoken forms.

Despite this, little in the way of an investigation of gestures from a linguistic perspective has been undertaken, and with the reorientation of linguistics that occurred under the influence of Chomsky, which turned it into a kind of 'mental science', among those interested in language gesture appeared to disappear altogether as a topic of inquiry (Kendon 1982). Yet, curiously enough, it is really as a consequence of linguistics having come to be defined as a kind of mental science, which led directly to the development of studies of cognitive processes, that we have the situation we see today in which gesture is once again being investigated quite vigorously by those with an interest in language. If language is a cognitive activity, and if, as is clear, gestural expression is intimately involved in acts of spoken linguistic expression, then it seems reasonable to look closely at gesture for the light it may throw on this cognitive activity. This is leading to a new way in which the issue of the relationship between language and gesture can be approached.<sup>1</sup>

It will be clear that I am not here adopting the very radical definition of 'gesture' proposed by Armstrong, Stokoe & Wilcox that I cited at the beginning. I continue to use the term in its more usual meaning which, roughly speaking, refers to that range of visible bodily actions that are, more or less, generally regarded as part of a person's willing expression. This differentiates it from the expression of affect, on the one hand, which is typically seen as something that we cannot help, and, on the other, from those aspects of behavior such as posture and postural shifting, direction of gaze, and the like, which play a role in the processes by which participants in interaction establish and maintain their orientations to one another, but are not part of those packages of action by which greetings are exchanged, goods are bartered, stories are told, plans are laid, philosophical arguments are worked out, gossip is accomplished, and so on. There is, to be sure, no hard-and-fast line between what is 'gesture' and what is not, but there is, nonetheless, little difficulty with agreeing what it includes: handwavings or gesticulations that accompany talk and various kinds of more or less conventionalized actions which have a symbolic or semiotic function, as well as so-called gesture systems, alternate sign languages, and primary sign languages, all of which are fashioned from the same material, so to speak, and have certain features in common in consequence, but which, at the same time, may show very different kinds of organization.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter I shall confine myself to a consideration of gesturing as it is found in the context of spoken interaction. I shall not consider autonomous gesture systems at all. However, I should like to point out that a comparative study of such systems, including both those of the simplest kind,

as developed for use in work environments such as sawmills, where talk is impossible, to the most complex kinds of alternate and primary sign languages, provides for another way in which the question of the relationship between 'language' and 'gesture' can be investigated. Such comparative studies yield three main insights. First, that there is a close relationship between the complexity of the system developed and the degree to which the circumstances of its use are unspecialized. Second, however, for such systems to develop complexity it is also necessary that there be a COMMUNITY of users. In those few cases where we are able to look at situations where the use of a gesture system is confined to a non-reciprocated social role, the development of the system is highly limited. Third, the more unspecialized the system is in its uses, the greater the creativity to be observed within it. And it is here that we are able to find a continuum of forms ranging from forms which are locally created or improvised, through forms that are but partially lexicalized, to forms that are fully lexicalized and which participate in constructions built according to rules of syntax. The comparative study of autonomous gesture systems, thus, provides us with a way of seeing that systems that have all the structural features of a language are continually emerging through a process of evolution that depends upon appropriate circumstances of social interaction and institutionalization. This is another way in which it can be demonstrated that language is not a sharply bounded system but is, rather, something that is an emergent product of processes of semiotic and social evolution.<sup>3</sup>

Let me now turn to illustrations of some of the diverse ways in which gesture may be involved in acts of speaking. On the basis of these illustrations I shall argue for a functional continuity between language, as manifested in speech, and gesture. My perspective is semiotic and communicative. I shall argue that it is through the partnership between gesture and speech that we see so often in co-present conversation, that utterance meaning is achieved. I regard gesture as a mode of symbolic representation, just as spoken language is. However, in gesture, representation is achieved in ways that are different from spoken language. For example, in gesture it is possible to represent spatial relationships by means of spatially distributed displays; forms of movement can be created that can serve a variety of symbolic purposes; visible forms can be shaped that can be used as representations of concrete objects, which may serve as a means of referring to such objects either in their own right or metaphorically. Furthermore, because, as we shall see, it is possible to organize these representations concurrently with spoken forms, gesture can be used to create additional, overarching layers of meaning, overcoming, to some extent, the limitations imposed by the temporal linearity of spoken utterance. This makes it possible, for instance, for gesture to be used as a way of displaying

in a continuous fashion higher-order semantic units that, of necessity, can emerge only bit by bit as they are expressed verbally. And it makes it possible for a speaker to display aspects of pragmatic meaning that govern whole stretches of discourse. This can have important consequences for how the speaker's recipients interpret what is being said.

With the exception of the first example to be presented, the examples I shall discuss come from video recordings made of naturally occurring conversations in a small town about ten kilometers inland from Salerno, in Italy.<sup>4</sup> Here I attempt to illustrate several ways in which gesture may operate in the context of spoken discourse in general. Whether, and in what ways, these uses of gesture are culturally specific I shall not discuss here – although some of the examples I shall show do involve the use of forms of gesture that are specific to southern Italy. But some of the others appear to have a much more widespread use.

## 2 Contextualizing functions of gesture: making meaning more precise

Speakers often employ gesture in such a way as to make something that is being said more precise or complete. Spoken words on their own, of course, are inherently ambiguous, and what a speaker means by the words or phrases used only becomes clear as they are set in a wider context. Such a context can indeed be created by how the expression is embedded in the spoken discourse itself. However, gesture also often plays a role in this.

The first example I shall give to illustrate this is taken from a narration in English of the fairy story 'Little Red Riding Hood'. The student doing the narration had been asked to tell the story as best she could, as if it were for an audience of children.<sup>5</sup>

She reaches the point in the story when the wolf, having swallowed the grandmother, is now chasing Little Red Riding Hood with the intention of eating her too. The hunter, on seeing Little Red Riding Hood rushing out of the cottage being chased by the wolf, runs up and kills the wolf. This scene is narrated in the following words:

- (1) and saw this wolf come bouncing out of the door after Little Red Riding Hood, and the hunter took his axe, and with one mighty heave, sliced the wolf's head off, and thought, 'Ha, I've saved the little girl, she should be happy now'

As she says "and the hunter took his axe" she moves both hands together as if grasping an axe by the handle; as she says "and with one mighty heave" she raises her hands above her shoulder as if enacting lifting an axe above the shoulder ready for use; and as she says "sliced" she moves both hands in a rapid downward diagonal, leftward sweep, as if to enact the action of the

hunter as he struck the wolf. It is important to note the hands move downwards diagonally, as befits the sort of more-or-less downward stroke that would be appropriate for cutting off a wolf's head.

The narrator then continues by quoting Little Red Riding Hood's reaction to what had been done. Little Red Riding Hood tells the hunter that the wolf has eaten her grandmother. The story is then continued in the following words:

- (2) and the hunter said, 'Oh, that's soon remedied,' and took his hatchet, and with a mighty sweep sliced the wolf's stomach open, at which point the grandmother popped out

The gesturing that accompanies this passage is very similar to that in the previous one. Again, as she says "and took his hatchet" she acts as if she is grasping the handle of an axe or hatchet, and as she says "and with a mighty sweep" she raises and then holds her hands above her right shoulder as if in readiness to swing the weapon; and as she says "sliced" she again swings her arms rapidly leftward, as if enacting the hunter's action. But what is to be noted here is that the hands are now swung in a horizontal fashion, not on a downward diagonal. This (at least to me) conveys the idea of handling the axe so that it will produce a longitudinal cut, appropriate, perhaps, for opening a dead wolf's stomach.

Now, the thing to notice is that the speaker uses the same verb in both cases. In the first case she says "sliced the wolf's head off," and in the second case she says "sliced the wolf's stomach open." The action entailed by the task that the verb refers to in each case is different, however, and this is the difference that is made apparent in the contrast in how she performs the arm swing in each case. English offers more than one type of cutting verb. For example, she could have said *chopped* in the first case and *slit* in the second case, and in doing this she would have conveyed in a more differentiated fashion the details of the manner of action involved which the use of the verb *slice* in each case obscures. Here, however, she varies her gesture and so succeeds in conveying this additional part of the meaning.

To me, this is a useful example because we have the contrast: different gesture with what is, lexically, the same verb in each case. Yet it is clear that the verb is not, in fact, the same. The difference between the two 'local' meanings of *slice* is here made clear by the gesture.

Now I will offer two other examples which show something very similar. In these examples, an object is referred to as part of a description of something, but the way this object is arranged in space or the character of its shape or size and the way it achieves the function attributed to it, is indicated in gesture. Thus, at a dinner party, the discussion has turned to pear trees and the problem of supporting the branches when they are laden with

heavy fruit. Different methods of support are described. One speaker says: "No, ci mettono le mazze sotto" ('No, they put staves underneath'). As he says "le mazze" ('staves'), with his forearm held vertically and his hand held with the fingers extended but drawn together in a bunch, he lifts his arm twice, as if to describe something vertical that is holding something up. The gesture here completes his description, for his verbal statement gives no indication of how the staves are placed under the tree or how they might serve as supports.

Another speaker, in the same discussion, says: "Io tutte le volte che andavo a Battipaglia mi colpiva questo telaio di fili che stava all'interno dell'albero" ('Every time I used to go to Battipaglia I was struck by this web of wires inside the tree'). As she says "telaio di fili" ('web of wires'), she twice lifts her hand, held with palm facing downwards and fingers spread, drawing the fingers together as she does so, providing an image of the radiating wires that suspend the branches of the pear tree from a central vertical tree or post set within the tree. In this case "telaio di fili" contains only the idea that there are many wires arranged in a 'web', but it gives no indication of the shape or orientation of this web or how, being within the tree, it could contribute to supporting the branches of the tree. With the gesture, the expression is given the context of a visual representation which immediately makes this clear.

In these examples the gesture seems to provide the context in terms of which a verbal expression is to be interpreted. Sometimes it does more than this, however, adding additional components of substantive meaning. For example, during a conversation about a robbery recorded at a bocce (indoor bowls) club, a speaker describes the condition of a door as it had been found after the break-in. He says: "Ieri mattina amma truat' rotto il pannello" ('Yesterday morning we found the panel broken'). As he says "rotto il pannello" ('the panel broken'), he turns to a door he is standing next to and uses his hands to sketch a rectangular area over the lower part of it. In this way he shows that it was the lower panel that had been broken, something he has not referred to in words at all.

Another example will show another way in which gesture can be used to add meaning. In this case, the gesture conveys an additional, more abstract, meaning that is implied by what is being said. A speaker, describing a situation which, for him, illustrates a more general idea, provides in gesture a reference to this more general idea while he provides concrete details in his speech. Thus a bus driver from the city of Salerno is lamenting the bad behavior of the youths who ride the buses he drives. He describes how boys write what he considers to be shameful phrases on the backs of the seats of the buses; that they do this in full view of the girls, who do not object. The girls are, he says, fully aware of what the boys write, and seem to be happy

about it. The implication of this is that the girls are equally involved in this kind of activity; they are equally responsible for it. This implication, however, the speaker does not express directly in words but uses a gesture to suggest it. His speech is as follows

(3) [. . .] Hanno il ragazzo a fianco/ il fidanzato o il ragazzo/ che co-continua a disegnare a pennellare e loro guardano/ non è che ci dicono: “cretino! che stai scrivendo là!”/ sono contente/ quindi sono consapevoli anche loro/ gli sta bene anche a loro questa

[. . .] they [the girls] have the boy at their side/ the boyfriend or the boy/ who co-continues to draw to paint and they look/ they don't say: “Idiot! What are you writing there!”/ they are happy/ hence they also are aware of it / It's OK also for them this

As he says “they are happy, hence they also are aware of it. It's OK also for them this” he extends his two index fingers and places them alongside one another in a gesture that is well known and is generally glossed as meaning ‘equal’ or ‘the same’. Thus the implication of what he is saying, that the girls are equal in their responsibility for this bad behavior, equal in their participation in it, is made manifest in gesture but is not expressed in so many words in the speech. It is interesting to note that it is precisely this general implication that is picked up in his interlocutor's response, for she says “Il livello di partecipazione sociale, maschi e femmine è la stessa cosa” (“The level of social participation, males and females, it's the same thing”).

### 3 Meta-substantive meanings in gesture

In the examples given so far I have shown some of the different ways in which gesture may contribute to the propositional meaning of an utterance.

The first three examples showed how gesture often provides a context that makes a verbal expression more precise. Then I gave two examples that show how gesture can do more than this: it can contribute additional substantive content. Now I wish to illustrate how gesture is often used as a way of giving expression to pragmatic aspects of the utterance.<sup>6</sup> I shall introduce this use by describing an example in which a speaker repeats something he has just said. However, this repetition has nothing to do with a repair. It is done as a means of recasting what is said as a new or different speech act. We can see this not only in the way the stress pattern, intonation, and voice level alter. We also see it in the change in the gesture that is used.

The example comes from a recording of a meeting of the committee of the bocce club. The question of who will be listed as sponsors on the poster which will announce the competition is being discussed. Enzo has said that

on the poster announcing the competition all the various sponsors will be listed no matter the size of their contribution. Peppe, for some reason, objects to this idea. To press his case, Enzo now takes a specific example, the poster for the competition held at San Severino. He says:

E (4) e allor' e allor' facimm' 'na kos'  
e allora e allora facciamo una cosa  
and well, and well, let's do one thing! [Let's take an example]

(5) 'a gar' a San S'v'rin'  
la gara a San Severino  
the competition at San Severino

(6) gara nazionale a San S'v'rin'  
gara nazionale a San Severino  
national competition at San Severino

(7) primo trofeo provincia di Salerno  
first trophy, province of Salerno

(8) stev' cinquant' sc'ponzorizzazion' a sott'  
c'era cinquanta sponsorizzazioni sotto  
there was [were] fifty sponsors below

(9) cinquant' sc'ponzorizzazion' no una sol'  
cinquanta sponsorizzazioni, non una sola  
fifty sponsors, not only one

In line (8) Enzo says “there were fifty sponsors below.” He says this, looking at Peppe, and as he does so, with his two hands held open and palms facing each other, he traces out on the table in front of him a sort of oval shape which seems to suggest the spatial arrangement of all the names on the poster. Peppe remains rigid at the conclusion of this utterance; he shows no change in expression whatever. Enzo now repeats what he has just said (line 9) – but this time he looks away from Peppe, actually in the direction of Giovanni, who is at the other end of the table. And now he holds up both hands, spread, palm out, moving them laterally and slightly downward as he does so. The utterance is thus redesigned, as it were, but now, instead of providing a representation of what the poster looked like with all the names printed on it, he does a gesture which expresses the notion that what is being asserted blocks whatever another might say to counter it. That is to say, in this repetition he does a gesture that now expresses the speaker's view of the role this utterance will play as a move in the rhetorical organization of the discourse.

The Palm Away Open Hands Laterally Spread gesture that Enzo uses

here is an example of one of several recurrent gestural forms that have what may be called PRAGMATIC functions. They serve as markers of the speaker's attitude toward what he is saying, or they express his expectations about how what he is saying is to be dealt with by his interlocutor, or they express the nature of the illocutionary intent of the utterance of which it is a part.

Another example of a gesture of this sort is provided by the so-called 'purse hand' gesture, or *mano a borsa*. This is a well-known and widely used form that has been described a number of times in books about Italian gesture. For example, Andrea de Jorio, writing about Neapolitan gesture in 1832, described it as one of the gestures used when one asks for something. Diadori also describes it in her book, published in 1990, on gestures that should be learned by students of Italian as a foreign language. Diadori says that it is commonly associated with phrases such as *Ma che stai dicendo* 'What are you saying?' or *Ma che fai* 'What are you doing?'

Examining the contexts in which the *mano a borsa* is used in the material I have recorded, I find that it is commonly used when the speaker is asking a question that seems to have arisen because his assumptions or expectations have been undermined, when he is asking a question for which he believes no real answer is possible, or when he is asking a question that is intended to challenge or call into question actions or statements of another.

For instance, Luigi comes to tell Enzo that the telephone number he had tried in order to reach someone on bocce club business was not correct. Enzo is puzzled by this, because he thought he had given Luigi this number. Enzo asks Luigi: "Ki 'o pigljaj' 'o numm' r' ri Kacciator'?" ('But who got this number for the Hunters?'), using the *mano a borsa* as he does so. In another instance, Sandro is puzzled because the robbers who entered the bocce club stole the telephone. Because it was a telephone rented from the state telephone company, it could not be resold, and so it seemed to be of no value to a robber. Using the *mano a borsa*, Sandro asks: "Ma a che serv' killu telef'n'?" ('But what do you use that telephone for?') In a third example, Peppe asks Giovanni how he thinks the robber could have entered the building. Giovanni, as puzzled as Peppe, turns the question back to him as he says: "Don Pe' ma dicit' m' vuj', un' ka tras' ka dint' ka vo 'i a 'rrubbà' ka dint', che marjuolo è?" ('Don Peppe, but you tell me, but someone that enters in order to steal here inside, what sort of thief he is!') As he closes this utterance with "che marjuolo è?" he uses the *mano a borsa*.

The *mano a borsa*, thus, seems to be used in association with asking a question when that question arises because the speaker finds that he cannot take his expectations for granted, or when he finds that he is faced with some information, also shared by others, for which there is no apparent explanation. If the speaker asks a question simply as an attempt to gain

needed information which he does not have but assumes another may possess, he does not use this gesture.

This explanation for the use of the *mano a borsa* can also be applied when, as sometimes happens, we see the gesture used when a speaker is not asking a question but making a statement in reply to a question. The instances we have observed where this happens are those in which a speaker is replying to a question that has been asked him before or which, in some other way, appears to violate the rules that govern the asking of questions in conversation. In these instances, it is as if the speaker, at the same time as he answers his interlocutor, and so provides the second part of the adjacency pair the question had created, also indicates that he is questioning his interlocutor's basis for the question he is asking. In these instances it seems that the speaker makes one kind of conversational move in his spoken reply and in his gesture, he makes another kind of move.

The first example comes from the discussion of telephone numbers. At an earlier stage of the conversation, Enzo found out from Giovanni that a certain telephone number had been passed to him by a certain person. Enzo goes to check this, and later returns in some agitation, because the number given is a number of something completely different from that which Giovanni supposed. Enzo does not explain this immediately but comes back into the room asking Giovanni, in some agitation:

- E (10) Giovà' addò 'u pigljaj' 'stu kos' ?  
Giovanni dove lo prese questa cosa?  
where did he get this thing?
- (11) sc'kus'  
scusa  
sorry / excuse me
- (12) 'stu 'stu numm' r' 'i telef'n' ?  
questo questo numero di telefono?  
this this telephone number?
- (13) addò 'u pigljaj' Albert' ?  
dove lo prese Alberto?  
where did Alberto get it ?
- G (14) 'ngopp' a l'elenk' re società  
sull'elenco delle società  
in the list of societies

Gesture: *mano a borsa*

As he makes his reply (line 14) he uses *mano a borsa*. Since Enzo had already asked Giovanni this same question but a few minutes before, Giovanni is

puzzled as to why Enzo should again be asking him where he got the number. His *mano a borsa* here thus appears to serve to indicate to Enzo that, even as he is giving him an answer to his question, he is at the same time asking, in effect, 'What are you asking me this for?'

The next example is similar. It again involves Enzo and Giovanni, but in this case the topic is the robbery. The question at issue is whether certain doors had been open or closed at the time when the robbery took place. Giovanni asserts that someone opened a certain door so that he could see if another door, opening on some stairs, was open or closed. Enzo, overhearing this assertion, emerges from a neighboring room to ask Giovanni who opened it, and then he asks Giovanni:

E (15) Ma, ma l'ha aperto lui quella porta che va sul terrazzo?  
But, but he opened that door that goes onto the terrace?

– thus questioning him further as to which door exactly it was that had been opened. Giovanni replies, with a rising voice level:

G (16) Eh! p' gli' a v'rè –  
Yes! In order to go and see –

(17) p' v'rè k' 'a port' p' v'rè 'u purton' ind' 'e sc'kalinat'  
In order to go to see – in order to see that the door on the stairs

(18) si stev' kjus' o stev' apiert'  
if it was closed or open

As Giovanni says (18) "si stev' kjus' o stev' apiert'" ('if it was opened or closed'), he forms the *mano a borsa*. Here Giovanni is not asking a question, he is giving a reply, and yet he uses *mano a borsa*.

It is notable here that Giovanni maintains his hand in *mano a borsa* throughout three further turns in this exchange. Enzo again asks about the door opening: "Eh! aprì lui quella porta?" ('He opened that door?'); Giovanni replies "Eh!" ('Yeah!'); whereupon Enzo says "No! kill' ric' k' anna truat' apert' kella port'" ('No, he said he found that door open'). Only when Giovanni responds to this last utterance does he change from the *mano a borsa*.

Enzo had been told that Vincenzo had found the door in question open. Giovanni had been told that nothing had been found open. Enzo's close questioning of Giovanni here arises from the fact that Enzo had an understanding different from that of Giovanni. As in the previous example, at the same time as he is replying to Enzo's questions he is also saying, with the gesture, "And what are you asking me all this for?" The attitude in terms of which he is framing this entire exchange, thus, is indicated by the *mano a borsa* gesture.

In this exchange, we also see another instance of the use of gesture as an indicator of a 'para-move'. We see this in Enzo, although in his case a gesture known as the *mani giunte* is used. In this gesture the hands, with fingers fully extended and adducted, are held palm-to-palm in a gesture that looks very much like the Christian gesture of prayer (there may be a relationship between the two). The *mani giunte* is a widely used form. According to our observations, it is commonly used as a way of indicating that what is being said is a request to the other to relieve one of certain obligations or responsibilities. For instance, in a situation where a problem has been raised for discussion that a member of the group does not want to discuss, the reluctant member says: "Qua abbiamo parlato per una riunione intera l'altra volta" ('But we discussed that for an entire meeting the other time'). As he makes this assertion he uses *mani giunte*, thus indicating that what he is doing here is asking that the discussion not be held. Likewise, when Enzo has been asked to make a certain telephone call, he says: "Ma io tengo u consiglio nu momento" ('But I have a council meeting in a moment'), but as he says this he performs *mani giunte* as if to make explicit the point that the council meeting makes it impossible for him to make the telephone call, and therefore he should be relieved of the responsibility of doing it.

In the present example, Enzo uses *mani giunte* as he says: "No! kill' ric' k' anna truat' apert' kella port'" ('No, he said that they found that door open!'). As we said above, as we learn when we examine the entire dialogue, Enzo has been given to understand something different from Giovanni. He is therefore puzzled by what Giovanni has told him. The *mani giunte* here does not mark the spoken utterance as a move by which he requests any change in his obligations. Rather, at the same time as he produces his report he also indicates his puzzlement through the use of *mani giunte*. In effect, he is asking, 'Can you please explain to me why you are telling me these things and so relieve me of the difficulties I will find myself in if there is a contradiction in these accounts.'

In the examples just given, as we noted, the speaker not only formed his gesture while he was speaking, but he maintained it afterwards. He continued to hold his hand up in the form of the gesture he had used, even while the other was speaking. With gestures of the type we have been discussing, this is very common. The speaker maintains the gesture after he finishes speaking, sometimes doing so during a part or even the whole of his interlocutor's next turn. Thus, when Enzo asks Luigi: "Ki' o pigljaj' 'o numm' r' rì Kacciator'?" ('Who got this number for the Hunters?'), he maintains his *mano a borsa* until, from Luigi's reply, it is clear he is not going to answer Enzo's question but is going to go on to say what happened when he called the number in question. When S asks: "Ma a che serv' killu telef'n'?" ('But

what do you use that telephone for?'), he is looking at Giovanni. He maintains his *mano a borsa* during a pause that follows, during which Giovanni continues to look at him. When Giovanni looks away without saying anything, however, Sandro drops his hand.

In all of the cases where the gesture persists after the speech, it would seem that the speaker is maintaining a display of the frame of mind or intention that informed his last utterance, and so he displays the interpretative frame in terms of which he will respond to whatever his interlocutor may say. An utterance, looked at from the point of view of its role in a conversation, always creates expectations for whoever it is who is next speaker. A current turn at talk places constraints on whoever has the next turn. These constraints may vary in their tightness, and questions of the sort illustrated here may be particularly constraining. The maintenance of the speech-act-marking gesture during the turn slot of the recipient serves to reinforce that constraint. It is a visible reminder to the recipient as to what is now expected of him. Such sustained gestures are maintained just until that point in the other's speech where the nature of his response becomes projectable – that is, to that point in the respondent's utterance where it becomes clear either that an answer is forthcoming or that the respondent is not going to take up the question. Sometimes the sustained gesture is kept up through more than one turn, and where this is so the gesturer continues, through the following turn, to pursue the issue that he raised in the first turn.

#### 4 Conclusions

Let us now take stock of this rather complex presentation of examples. It has been my intention to illustrate some of the diverse ways in which gestures, as used in partnership with speech, participate in the construction of the utterance's meaning. I began with examples that showed how gesture can be used to provide context for spoken expression, thus reducing the ambiguity of the meaning of what is expressed. We saw, however, that gesture goes further than this. It can also add to the propositional content of the utterance. I then showed examples which illustrated how, as something spoken is recast from one kind of speech act to another, this recasting may also involve the way gesture is used. And we saw in this example how the speaker shifted the role that gesture had in the utterance. In this case it shifted from participating in the expression of substantive content (in the first utterance) to participating in expressing aspects of the pragmatic intent of the utterance (in its repetition). I then described some observations on the contexts of use of two gestural forms in widespread use which function mainly to express the speech-act status of the utterance. We saw

how this is not just a matter of a kind of visual labeling of an utterance already constructed as a speech act of a certain type, however. These gestures are also found to be used as a way of accomplishing more than one speech act simultaneously. Thus we saw how Giovanni used the *mano a borsa* to show that, in the same moment as he was giving his reply, he also was questioning the legitimacy of his interlocutor's question.

There is no opportunity here for me to say anything in detail about how the gestures I have been discussing are timed in relation to the spoken phrases they are associated with. It must be sufficient here for me to say that any examination of this would make it quite clear that the gestures are organized in relation to the spoken phrases they accompany in such a way that we must say that they are part of the very construction of the utterance itself. Gesture and speech, in all the examples I have given here, are composed together as components of a single overall plan. We have to say that although each expresses somewhat different dimensions of the meaning, speech and gesture are co-expressive of a single inclusive ideational complex, and it is this that is the meaning of the utterance.

To conclude, let me return to the question posed at the outset: Do we claim a 'unity' of language and gesture, or do we claim 'diversity'? Insofar as we are concerned with what participants in conversation do as they construct utterances, it seems clear that they use gesture and speech in partnership and can shift the respective roles of gesture and speech in the utterance from one moment to the next in ways that seem rhetorically appropriate. To be sure, the way gestures are composed as semiotic forms is very different from the way spoken words and phrases are composed. This should not surprise us. The two modes of expression employ different media which have different possibilities. As we saw, gesture can be useful as a way of exhibiting overarching units of meaning, as a way of keeping visible an aspect of meaning throughout the course of a spoken utterance or even after the speech has finished. Gesture and speech, as used in conversation, serve different but complementary roles. There is, so to speak, no need for gesture to develop spoken-language-like features to any great degree, so long as spoken language is there for it to be used in conjunction with. Notwithstanding this, as readers may have noted, some of the gestures I have discussed are quite conventional in form and may, in some environments, actually function as if they are lexical items. This is true of the 'equals' gesture I illustrated in the case of the Salerno bus driver, for example. When gesture is used routinely as the only medium of utterance, however, it rapidly takes on organizational features that are very like those found in spoken language.<sup>7</sup>

I end, then, as I began. If, with Whitney, we think of 'language' as a complex of instrumentalities which serve in the expression of 'thought' (as



he would say – one might not wish to put it quite like this today), then gesture is a part of ‘language’. For those of us with an interest in language conceived of in this way, our task must include working out all the intricate ways in which gesture is used in relation to speech and of showing the circumstances in which the organization of each is differentiated from the other as well as the ways in which they overlap. This can only enrich our understanding of how these instrumentalities function. If, on the other hand, we define ‘language’ in structural terms, thus excluding from linguistic consideration most, if not all, of the kinds of gestural usages I have illustrated today, we may be in danger of missing important features of how language, so defined, actually succeeds as an instrument of communication. Such a structural definition is valuable as a matter of convenience, as a way of delimiting a field of concern. On the other hand, from the point of view of a comprehensive theory of how humans do all the things they do by means of utterances, it cannot be sufficient.

## NOTES

- 1 See McNeill (1992) for an elaboration of this theme. Kendon (1997) discusses this in relation to other aspects of the gesture–speech relationship.
- 2 For discussions relevant to the problem of defining ‘gesture’, see Kendon (1981a, 1985).
- 3 For discussion of ‘alternate’ sign languages (i.e., sign languages used in speaker–hearer communities), see Kendon (1988, 1990). See also Farnell (1995).
- 4 I am indebted to Professor Pina Boggi Cavallo of the University of Salerno for her introductions to people and situations in which it was possible to make these recordings, and to the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Inc., for financial assistance. Maria De Simone of Salerno provided transcriptions. Further revisions of these transcriptions have been undertaken by Laura Versante of the Istituto Universitario Orientale in Naples.
- 5 This example was previously reported in part in Kendon (1993).
- 6 Some of the examples described in this section are also reported in Kendon (1995), which gives an account both of some ‘illocutionary marker’ gestures and ‘discourse structure marker’ gestures in southern Italian conversation.
- 7 See McNeill (1992: 69–72) for an account of an experimental demonstration of this. See also Goldin-Meadow, McNeill & Singleton (1996).

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