Markus Steinbach

The semantics of gestures in sign language narration

Wednesday, November 13, 12:00-1:30pm
Social Sciences Building Tea Room

In their seminal paper, Clark and Gerrig (1990) have already highlighted the importance of gestural demonstration for a comprehensive theory of speech and action reports in spoken language. However, only with the advent of formal semantic and pragmatic analysis of quotation in sign languages as well as an increasing interest in gestural demonstrations used in quotations in both modalities, the idea of “quotation as demonstrations” is back on the table (see, e.g. Goldin-Meadow & Brentari 2017; Schlenker 2018). Especially Kate Davidson’s (2015) unified analysis of English “be-like” constructions and role shift in American Sign Language (ASL) does not only offer a smart extension of Donald Davidson’s (1984) traditional analysis of written language quotations as semantic demonstrations and Clark and Gerrig’s analysis of spoken language quotations as gestural demonstrations but also paved the way for a new formal account of quotation across modalities at the interface between semantics and pragmatics. In this paper, I’ll first outline the complexity of multi-modal quotations in all three modalities with a focus on gestural demonstrations in sign language narration. In the second part, I’ll propose an extended version of a theory of quotation as (linguistic and gestural) demonstrations to make another step towards a unified and cross-modal theory of quotation beyond (but not excluding) the meaning of quotation marks.

Free and open to the public. ASL-English interpreting will be provided. Persons with disabilities who need an accommodation in order to participate in this event should contact Zena Levan at zena@uchicago.edu. Organized by The Center for Gesture, Sign, and Language.