

Differences in the at-issue status of viewpoint gestures: Inherent or QUD-dependent?

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This paper investigates the at-issue status of two types of iconic gestures, namely character and observer viewpoint gestures (CVGs: depict events from a first-person perspective; OVGs: depict events from a third-person perspective, McNeill 1992). Walter (2022) reported the findings of a rating study suggesting that CVGs are more at-issue than OVGs, in line with Barnes and Ebert's (2023) gradient approach to at-issueness. In Walter's (2022) study, the question participants were asked in each trial explicitly targeted the gesture's content. It is thus possible that CVGs and OVGs are equally not-at-issue when their content does not explicitly address the QUD, since Barnes and Ebert (2023) propose that expressions addressing the QUD can shift toward the at-issue dimension. The present study investigates this, hypothesizing that CVGs are more at-issue than OVGs, in line with the findings of Walter (2022).

A rating study was conducted pairing videotaped utterances with written responses. The videotaped utterances either contained a CVG (1a), an OVG (1a), or a verbalized version of the gestures (1b).

(1) a. Letzten Mittwoch hatte ich den ganzen Tag Termine überall in der Stadt. Nachdem einer der Termine länger dauerte als gedacht, musste ich mich [richtig beeilen.] + CVG running (whole body)/OVG running with two fingers

b. Letzten Mittwoch hatte ich den ganzen Tag Termine überall in der Stadt. Nachdem einer der Termine länger dauerte als gedacht, musste ich mich richtig beeilen und rennen.

'Last Wednesday I had many appointments throughout the whole city. After one of the appointments took longer than expected, I had to hurry a lot (and run).'

Each utterance was paired with a sentence corresponding to Tonhauser's (2012) diagnostic #1c for (not-)at-issue content (2). This response is only felicitous if not-at-issue content is targeted in the adversative continuation.

(2) Yes, true, but you didn't have to run.

Participants judged the acceptability of (2) as an answer to (1). Thus, this question did not directly target the gesture's content. No significant rating differences were observed between the two gesture conditions. This opposes the initial hypothesis, since the results suggest that both types of viewpoint gestures are equally not-at-issue if their content does not address the QUD. However, this is still in line with Barnes and Ebert's (2023) gradient approach to at-issueness. A potential explanation why CVGs can shift more toward the at-issue dimension than OVGs might be grounded in their higher informativity (Beattie and Shovelton 2002), thus making them more relevant to the QUD.

References

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