

Jürgen Streeck. *Gesturecraft. The manufacture of meaning.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2009, 235 pp. 90 €. ISBN: 9789027228420

Despite the recent emergence of a mainstream of interest in the topic, as indicated for example by the launch of a journal dedicated to gesture studies (*Gesture*, since 2001), the foundation of an International Society for Gesture Studies, the convening by the Society of a regular international conference and the series on Gesture Studies launched by John Benjamins where the book I am reviewing has been published, this field of research is still on the fringe of Translation and Interpreting Studies.

Jürgen Streeck's book on gesture is a combination of theoretical review, where he acknowledges the early roots of his approach, and empirical research by way of an analysis of a series of case studies, which provide him with data from interaction in the real lives of the people involved. Although he uses individuals from different cultural backgrounds, he does not focus on questions of cultural difference but rather ad hoc signs whose effects can be attributed to elements of natural meaning like indexicality and iconicity. Most of us encounter gesture primarily in mundane face-to-face conversations where they do not appear alone, but are interwoven with spoken language and seen and understood within the webs of meaning that spoken language spins. And yet, its co-occurrence with language does not solve the puzzle of gesture; linguistic context may well tell us what to look for when we look at a gesture, but it does not explain how we see what we see. Therefore, gestural understanding requires its own explanation.

Streeck conceives gesture as a family of human practices, not as a code or symbolic system or part of language, but as a constantly evolving set of largely improvised, heterogeneous, partly conventional, partly idiosyncratic, partly culture-specific and partly universal practices of using hands to produce situated understandings.

The author distinguishes six different ways (what he calls gesture ecologies) in which gestural activity can be aligned with the world, with concurrent speech, and with the interactants. These gesture activities are: making sense of the world at hand, disclosing the world within sight, depiction, thinking by hand: gesture as conceptual action, displaying communicative action, and ordering and mediating transactions. He thus moves from the peri-personal space to gestures at greater distance or removed from the world (in relation to visual fields or scapes) to the universe of discourse, the conceptual world and the abstract yet immediate world of communicative process and encounter. As far as

methodological issues are concerned, his approach is framed by the methodologies of conversation analysis and context analysis.

The book is divided into nine chapters. The first three form its stage-setting part. The second chapter sketches the methodology of interaction micro-analysis that has shaped his study of gesture. Chapter 3 offers a brief account of the evolution and functioning of the organs with which we gesture, namely, the hands. From chapter 4 to 8 different practice genres of gesture, corresponding to the abovementioned ecologies of gesture are described. The last chapter is a summary of the different gesture practices studied.

If our interest in the subject is motivated by the quest of cultural differences, as would be expected by researchers with a background in Translation and Interpreting Studies, we will feel disappointed, since his approach to gesture explicitly avoids attributing them to any one culture, finding terms such as “French gesture” or “Japanese nonverbal communication” naive and problematic. We should not expect to find a holistic approach to gesture either, since his study focuses specifically on the hands.

In sum, Streeck conceives gesture neither as a sign-system nor as a part of language nor as expressive behaviour, but as a mode of communicative praxis and craft, comprising skills, methods and techniques. Gesture is creative action, a mixture of traditional forms, personal habit, and spontaneous invention. Therefore, by inspecting gesture, we can also understand something about creativity in language. Different fields of study can benefit from this contribution to knowledge, such as anthropology, sociology, foreign language teaching, translation and interpreting studies, audiovisual translation and accessibility, among others. He himself identifies some lacunae in his study and points out some issues for further inquiry, which can also be inspiring for some scholars from various research backgrounds and interests.

Sara Rovira-Esteva, Grup de Recerca Inter-Asia / TXICC
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain
Sara.Rovira@uab.cat