Gestures and GIFs:

Examining the relationship between Multimodal GIF/text utterances and Speech/gesture utterance systems

By Philip Hickey

ABSTRACT

Developments in internet technology have led to more people making use of visual modalities for the purposes of social communication. This paper examines whether existing knowledge about visual communication through gesture is applicable as a way to better understand visual social communication mediated through computer environments. Specifically this paper explores sharing patterns of the animated reaction GIF and strives to explore the application of theories of co-speech gesture.

This paper first defines the GIF in terms of the visual culture that has developed as a part of internet culture. This definition is contextualised by the limitations of the early web which characterised the cultural conventions which surround the GIF today. Following this, we examine several reaction GIFs from various settings and websites. GIFs are analysed as part of a meaning system which relies equally on text based communication as it does on visual elements. GIF/text systems are coded using a Structural Functional Linguistics approach in order to establish a relationship between communication patterns which rely on the GIF as a constituent and natural speech models which include co-speech gestures.