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Gestures and Professional Reading: A Reading Aloud Teaching Practice Based on a Multimodal Approach

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Abstract – In the *diamesic continuum* from *spontaneous speech* to *written language*, many speech forms lack the unwilling responses and the reflex actions of face-to-face interaction. For instance, beyond *reading aloud speech*, the peculiarity typically regards *formal public speech* and *acted speech*. In fact, while in the spontaneous language performance, the ideational process is synchronous to the locutionary process, and speech goes on together with the flow of thought, in the reading, instead, the content is figured out completely only afterward, and also, for this reason, the performance frequently lacks communicative efficiency.

The paper offers an overview of an innovative reading-aloud teaching practice based on an empiric multimodal approach in which visuospatial sensorimotor dynamic instructions exploit the capability of gestures and body movements to trigger a meaningful, effective text interpretation.

Keywords – Diamesia; Multimodality; Linguistics; Gesture; Reading aloud; Embodiment; Visuospatiality; Sensomotricity.

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1. Premise: The Reasons for an Updated Reading-aloud Technique

Professionally speaking, in the current technological era *reading aloud* turns out to be an essential skill for many, such as teachers, professors, speakers, actors, politicians, influencers, journalists, et cetera, due for example to the massive use of mics in performances of any kinds, or to the growing of audiobook and podcasting production. On the other hand, in the Italian professional theatre environment the culturally shared array of techniques regarding *how to say a poetic, dramatic, or literary text in front of an audience* is still presumably affected by the outstanding opera tradition. As a result, Italian actors share product-oriented practices, based on a standardized repertoire of intonational patterns that, even if updated rhythmically and prosodically in search of more modern features, are basically pre-formatted and *added on* to utterances. These stereotypical procedures often lack the expected communicative success¹.

Updating reading-aloud practices is not only a professional matter. The increase in *functional illiteracy* is one of the major problems that must be faced to achieve the objectives declared by the United Nations in terms of promoting lifelong learning opportunities² (on the topic with regard to Italy cf. De Mauro, *Storia linguistica*). Certainly, today the phenomenon is also determined by the prevalence of the non-alphabetic vision compared to the alphabetic one, so that simultaneous intelligence, and the procedural thinking connected to it, replaced the sequential one (on the topic cf. Simone). Conversely, the process of reading requires mastering sequences.

The functional gap between the two varieties brought together into the reading, the oral and the written one, requires relevant observations about language. Turning back from *product* to *production* offers a crucial insight into the speech process.

The utterance performance is multimodal (Kendon; McNeill; Müller; Müller et al.), and thoughts, voice, and the meaningful movements that systematically accompany speech called gesticulation are seen as “intimately connected” (Kendon, *Gesticulation and Speech* 208). In this paper, we will show how it is possible to exploit the knowledge acquired in the field of

¹ We refer to the tradition of *table-work* as a type of theatre rehearsal widely practiced in Italy in the early stages of the process of staging a play. In a table-work rehearsal, the lines are analyzed and discussed by actors and the director and then put into voice by actors seeking the appropriate prosodic profile that most corresponds to the presumed intention of the character they work on.

² As in Goal 4 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for 2030, which claims: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (“Goal 4: Quality education.” *Joint SDG Fund*).

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multimodality and its relationship with the underlying concepts regarding gesture-speech integration for the purposes of reading.

The specific objective of the paper is to present the overall strategy of a multimodal cross-disciplinary technique named *Reading through the body* (*“Leggere con il corpo”*) that is double targeted: to develop professional skills, and to develop actions contrasting functional illiteracy and reading difficulties of many kinds. The technique has been frequently taught in training contexts for teachers, or actors and professional speakers; as well as it has been used as the basic methodology in the training of volunteer readers for the “Patto di Milano per la Lettura” (“Milan City of Literature”) in 2016-2017.

The paper is structured as follows: first, it will illustrate the background notions from which the technique takes its basic principles (par. 2); then it will list some methodological indications and in general the type of process-oriented adopted approach (par. 3); finally, it will propose three key aspects of the technique (parr. 4-5-6). In par. 7 some general conclusions will be drawn.

2. Background Notions

The proposed reading technique is grounded by considering three linguistic dimensions: *diamesic variation*, *gesture*, and *prosody*.

Firstly, the variation along the diamesic axis (Berruto) focuses on the contrast between the *written texts* as opposite to the *oral ones*. In the diamesic variation Nencioni (1-2), within the continuum that goes from the *parlato-parlato* (*spoken-speech*) to the *scritto-scritto* (*written-writing*) it is possible to find forms of realizations in between clustered as *parlato-scritto* (*spoken-writing*), such as the *parlato letto ad alta voce* (*reading aloud speech*); the *parlato pubblico formale* (*formal public speech*); the *parlato recitato* (*acted speech*).³ Of course, the *parlato-scritto* shares features of both varieties but lacks features of both. Namely, from an oral point of view, it loses the unwilling responses and the reflex actions of the *face-to-face interaction* and the synchronicity between the *ideational process* and the *speech activity*.

Considering the two *parlato-parlato* and *scritto-scritto* opposite edges, usually in a professional environment, is assumed that the missing features are oral characteristics, basically recoverable by “adding-on intonational repertoires”, as mentioned in par. 1. Methodologically speaking, it is about *going from the written to the oral variety*.

On the contrary, according to the first methodological element of the developed technique, readers go from the oral to the written. That is to say, not adding voice patterns, but letting them spontaneously emerge, capturing the energy and the structural organization of the flow rather than pretending it.

A large linguistic tradition starting from the 90s considers language dynamically and as an embodied phenomenon (cf. Kendon; McNeill; Mondada; Müller et al. ch. 2.3). In this tradition, the oral channel (speech) and the visual one (gesture) structurally interact, providing meaning. Gestures are considered *visible actions* (Kendon, *Gesture* 1-2), co-occurring with speech and displaying a wide spectrum of possible realizations that run from the complete singular idiosyncratic types (*gesticulation*) to the fully conventionalized types (*signs*) (McNeill, *Hand and Mind* ch. 2; *Gesture and Thought* ch. 1). Within gesticulation, a consistent number of gestural realizations are typically characterized by imagistic features.

³ All my translations.

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Let's make an example to make clear what is the contribution of imagistic movements to the utterance meaning. In one of his famous conferences posted on YouTube⁴, professor Galimberti ends a concept about the youth's erotism by claiming: "The erotism, the sexuality, is something that forces you *to radically remake your world-view, to reconsider yourself and the world*".⁵

Synchronously to the two infinitive clauses in italics, the speaker with the right forearm and hand makes twice a circular movement, vertically and parallelly to his torso, starting from the up-part of the circle and turning back to it after a full lap. (cf. Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Umberto Galimberti: "Il disagio giovanile nell'era del nichilismo."

The metaphoric value of the gesture is not by chance: the concept of *radically remaking a world-view* is accompanied by the image of a circumnavigation around the world, that is to say, that gesture copes semantically from an imagistic and dynamic point of view with what the words are saying. The gesture is repeated twice to be synchronous to the second infinitive clause, either semantically or cohesively.

It is important to underline that the imagery displayed by gestures is not photographic, but *meaningful body movements grounded in embodied experiences* (Müller 12), moreover considered by McNeill *visuospatial-actional* thinking (*Gesture and Thoughts* 212); and by Kita *spatio-motoric thinking* (171).

The relation between speech and gesture is systematically coordinated in the so-called multimodal utterance. Kendon postulated that "the pattern of movement that co-occurs with the speech has a hierarchic organization which appears to match that of the speech units" (*Some relation* 190); more radically McNeill claimed that gesture orchestrates speech, and that language is unpacked from thoughts in *gesture-speech units* tightly intertwined (*Why We Gesture* ch. 4).

So, gestures must be methodologically considered when developing a procedure regarding reading competence and performance, finally bringing the process into a broader multimodal and sensorimotor dimension of the utterance formation.⁶

Looking at the linguistic side of the multimodal utterance, it is important to introduce some aspects of prosody, absent in the written text, and must be recovered in reading together with its relationship with gestures. Prosody is considered here in the configurational frame of the Language into Act Theory – L-AcT (Cresti; Cresti, and Moneglia; Izre'el et al.). Following L-AcT, the verbal stream is composed of two-level units, hierarchically related and prosodically recognizable: *information units*, which segment the *flow of thought* in constituents (with regards to Chafe, *Meaning; Language*), and *reference units* (roughly speaking *utterances*: Cresti; Cresti, and Moneglia), which structure constituents at a higher level. Information unit and reference unit express two different aspects of verbal communication: the *information*

⁴ "Umberto Galimberti: Il disagio giovanile nell'era del nichilismo", trans. "Youth discomfort in the era of nihilism" (my transl.).

⁵ "L'erotismo e la sessualità è qualcosa che ti obbliga a rifare radicalmente la tua visione del mondo, a rigiudicare te stesso e il mondo"; my transl.; "Umberto Galimberti." *YouTube*, 00:18:05-00:18:15.

⁶ Müller "adopts a concept of language as inherently multimodal, usage-based, and dynamic" (2).

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structure, and the *illocutionary force*, given by the performance of the *speech acts* (Austin), as a result of two different cognitive patterns: the *semantic program* (with regard to Chafe, *Meaning*) and the language *action program* (with regard to Cresti). The resulting two-level structure is centered on the information unit type *comment*, which expresses the illocutionary force in a reference unit and is necessary.

On the other hand, gesticulation shows a linear structure that can be segmented into units aligned with those of the verbal stream, and that can be analysed at three hierarchic levels: *gesture units*, *gesture phrases*, and *gesture phases* (Kendon, *Gesture* ch. 7; McNeill, *Hand and Mind* ch. 3).

Like information units in L-AcT, the gesture's configurational model is based on compulsory information (the expressive phase made by at least one stroke: Kita et al. par. 3), constituting the main gestural prominence.

As a whole, the two structures, oral and gestural, offer a part-whole configurational model of perceptively recognizable units.

The strong correspondence between gesture and prosody makes it possible to investigate the varieties in the middle of the parlato-scritto spectrum. Cantalini and Moneglia, comparing spontaneous monological speech with acted monological speech, confirmed that the speech flow exhibits a strong correlation between gesture and speech units in both varieties but found significant differences between spontaneous and acted speech. Notably, in the acted variety, we have evidence of a consistent decrease in information patterning strategies in favour of text interpretations performed by the sole comment unit (illocutionary interpretation). This strategy runs in parallel with the reduction of gestural patterning. Gestural hierarchically different units tend to coincide; meanwhile, the gestural flow is frequently interrupted and does not develop overtly expressed units of gesticulation over a long arch of time as in the spontaneous variety.

Moreover, in the acted performance, the prosody and the gesticulation of the speakers examined, who are professional actors, are consistently less linguistically 'expressive,' contrary to what might be expected from the emotional attitude of actors. Acoustically, speakers may sound more emphatic, but linguistically and communicatively, they're not. The one-to-one relationship between linguistic and gestural units and between the two modes may suggest that only the *locutive program*, is going on, but the flow of thoughts, the *semantic program*, is not there. That is to say that the absence of the ideational process is significantly visible and audible.

In light of the above, we are driven to conclude that some gestural patterns seem to be connected specifically with the activity of the informational organization (the level of the information units) and that there might be an exclusive link between the ideational speaking process and the informational level, so that when the ideational process is missing, as in the parlato-scritto, the pragmatic level is kept, but the utterances are not patterned into prosodic units.

For the reading technique, the gestural and prosodic sides can be crucial. The linguistic elements to reinforce are connected with the informational organization and the body movements aligned with this organization.

The objectives of the reading-aloud technique will be to motivate the need to relate this practice not only with the inner characteristics of the written text, but also to integrate the reading with crucial missing structural components that are present in the spoken variety, and to finally recognize that 'the body' may play communicative and cognitive roles in oral communication and necessarily also in reading.

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3. Methodological Guidance

When dealing with a reading technique, after assuming the relevance of prosody, body movements, gestures, and flow of thought, it is essential to consider a more pedagogical-based point of view.

Reading is a reflexive action: once learned, it is performed automatically. When we operate on it, we act on an activity people know how to do. The methodology assumes that in order to improve, it is important to act on it indirectly, not by stopping the performance to correct it, but by inserting specific ‘triggers’ along the training process to free the energy of the flow.

For this purpose, it turns out to be crucial to inhibit external listening and to activate alternative procedures instead, whose basic principle could be summarized with the axiom ‘anything but correcting by ear.’

Accordingly, the pedagogical aspects of the approach involve choosing process-oriented rather than goal-oriented didactics, this reconnects to the most advanced theatrical pedagogy, which, from Stanislavskij’s system onwards, makes indirect action its main bulwark (Stanislavskij, part one). Therefore, not the *sound* but the *movement* must drive the reading reflexive activity, allowing the performing reader to achieve a rich informational basis for his activity.

The core idea guiding the proposed technique is to trigger the reading by activating the body. This is accomplished indirectly through the following phases:

- first step: ‘reading to themselves in motion’ (par. 4);
- second step: ‘reading to the others’ (par. 5);
- third step: ‘painting’ the reading (par. 6).

Each phase grounds the next one, which, in turn, absorbs organically the previous one.

4. First Step: ‘Reading to Themselves in Motion’

In step 1, the technique aims to upset the idea that the written line goes unidirectionally, from left to right, and therefore that the verbal streaming is also unidirectional. This is done by introducing the concept of *space* as underlying the concept of *information unit*, which we saw corresponds to a prosodic unit.

Along with this, we want to replace the awareness of lines made by *words* with the idea that lines are made by *groups of words*: not a linear series of ‘word-space-word-space’ and so on, but a more complex and structured configuration.

In fact, in our language performance, what effectively drives speaking is the *phrase level* of the language, i.e., a *group of words* that functions as a unit within a clause or sentence, framed into intonation units.

One of the procedures usually taught leads to articulation by separating words with the result that the flow and logic of what is said are interrupted. On the contrary, the proposed procedure tends to highlight the grammatical element that matches the informational level of the speech, which is connected with the flow of thought (cf. par. 3): clusters of words, cognitively structured, grammatically and semantically meaningful.

To achieve this purpose, according to a process-oriented approach, the text can be rewritten by inserting hyphens to suggest clusters rather than words and then to trigger movements.

In the first phase, the reader is asked to read strongly aloud and repeat it almost silently (directing the speech to himself although giving rise to acoustic feedback).

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In noticing the difference between the reading to himself and the aloud modality, the reader is surprised since it becomes clear that what he does for himself is usually different from what he does out loud. In other words, it becomes evident the difference between what is needed for him to understand the text and what he thinks should be the text performance.

He discovers the breaks he creates in his reading for himself. The number of syllables ranges from seven to eleven as in a medium length of prosodic units in speech (Chafe, *Discourse* 59) and never breaks syntactic constituent. Within the procedure all breaks type (prosodic, rhythmic, syntactic) are called *space*.

Moreover, the reader is asked to notice that when he reads for himself, his body moves while it is stocked in the loud modality. Spaces placed between information units result in being coordinated to movements of the back, the head, or the hands. Movements are an index of what the mind is doing to fit in and capture the flow of thought of the text. In accordance with spaces thus detected, the reader represents them with hyphens in the written text, as below in 1.

In the second phase, he practices the text aloud. He is invited not to think about the meaning, but just to perform the groups of words ‘as a whole’ between spaces up to the hyphen. The hyphen must be mentioned aloud as if it were the final part of that sequence (e.g., *quelramodellagodiComospazio*).

In the third phase, bodily movements and text understanding implement the procedure. Hyphens are not just targets to reach in the flow of speech, but also become directions for walking while reading (cf. Fig. 1).

The suggested direction represented the textual function of the units: the *center* is a forward step toward the center associated with the start of a new sentence; a *left* step is associated to a specification of a given concept; a *right* step is associated with the new information.

For example, the incipit of the famous Italian novel *I promessi sposi* is interpolated as follows:

1. Quel ramo del lago di Como, – *center* – che volge a mezzogiorno, – *left* – tra due catene non interrotte di monti, – *left* – tutto a seni e a golfi, – *left* – a seconda dello sporgere e del rientrare di quelli, – *left* – vien, – *right* – quasi a un tratto, – *left* – a ristringersi, – *right* – e a prender corso e figura di fiume, – *right* – tra un promontorio a destra, – *left* – e un'ampia costiera dall'altra parte; – *right* – (Manzoni, *I promessi sposi* ¹) –⁷

The reader walks laterally along the path and reads aloud. Each chosen direction must be said aloud at the end of the single group of words (e.g.: *quelramodellalagodiComocentro*).

In order not to interfere with spontaneous body movements, readers should not hold the paper or the book, so while stepping the text is positioned on the floor.

The sequences of movements and the changes in direction automatically influence intonational patterns. Readers have a clear perception of this change, in particular in the performance of the other participants, and can appreciate that the speech becomes more expressive and understandable.

⁷ “That branch of the Lake of Como, which turns toward the south between two unbroken chains of mountains, presenting to the eye a succession of bays and gulfs, formed by their jutting and retiring ridges, suddenly contracts itself between a headland to the right and an extended sloping bank on the left, and assumes the flow and appearance of a river” (Manzoni: *The Betrothed* 1).

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Fig. 2. “The walk into the space of the *Reading through the body* technique.” *Corriere della Sera*, 16 Feb. 2017. Courtesy of Claudio Furlan.

Then, finally, the reader can return to the usual line-by-line transcription, forget directions, and read Manzoni’s incipit again, just letting some of the new physical experience spontaneously emerge within the performance.

In this first part of the technique, therefore, a first step is taken towards the absorption of *space* and *path* into the reading process as elements that connect to the cognitive-communicative aspects of language. The reading performance slowly removes the sound stereotyped habits and regains the ability to logically and organically reconnect to the reader’s flow of thought.

5. Second Step: ‘Reading to the Others’

In the first step readers have been practically introduced to the concept of *information unit*, segmenting the text and performing it in movement. Information units, however, are the primary ‘cell’ of the discourse within the *information structure* (Halliday 55) or *information packaging* (Chafe, *Givenness* 28), which interfaces the level of prosody with the level of syntax and defines how information is formally packaged within a sentence.

The objective of the second step is to recover the information structure while reading, and this will be done again, triggering the voice through body movements in space, mirroring the text information structure. To this end, our technique matches linguistic notions to the visual-spatial relation and visual-spatial relations to body movements.

The basic notions of information structure are usually the pairs *thema/remata*; *topic/focus*; *topic/comment*; *given/new*. In our approach, we organize informational relations considering how what is said can be projected in space in a perceivable manner, organizing information in such a way as to have a *background* and a *foreground* in what we are saying.

The notions of *foreground* (or figure) versus *background* (or ground), first applied in Gestalt Psychology, are basic concepts in cognitive linguistics (Talmy; Sinha), and in gesture studies (Cienki) and work well for both perception and conceptualization of the textual information.

If, in par. 4, we saw that the unidirectionality of the written line might hide a bidirectional path, by applying the notions of *background* and *foreground*, we will see now what happens

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when the apparent one-dimensionality of the discourse flow reveals a three-dimensional structure conveyed by its informational organization.

Let's make one simple example considering the vision of a painting (*La Madonna del Cardellino* by Raffaello, cf. Fig. 3).⁸ When perceived, the bi-dimensional picture is mapped in a three-dimensional space.



Fig. 3. *La Madonna del Cardellino* by Raffaello.

What are the signals by which the observer understands the *foreground* and the *background* within the bi-dimensional space of the picture? Not considering perspective rules and complex pictorial techniques, we can observe that one of the major cues for the *background* is the *openness* realized by a never-ending feature, i.e. the landscape that seems to go beyond the frame; meanwhile, the *foreground* figures are given by an *ending one*, that is to say, the bounded triangular composition holding the main figures and keeping them inside the frame.

Something similar happens with the language. Its information structure is bipartisan and complies with perceptively based relationships.

As the speaker moves between levels and event lines, at any given moment some element is in focus and other elements recede in the background [...] This focal element will have the effect of “pushing the communication forward” of its event line and will provide its own local peak of C[ommunicative] D[ynamism]. (McNeill, *Hand and Mind* 207)⁹.

According to McNeill's suggestion, in the sequential configuration of the oral stream, it is always possible to recognize a *background information unit* and a *foreground information unit*.

The figurative opposition *foreground/closed* vs. *background/open* can be transferred in the language considering the prosodic profile of the informational components, which constitutes the bipartisan information structure of the utterance: the opposition between *closed shapes* vs. *open shapes*. That means that, while speaking, we mark the units of our discourse through prosody, usually the first part, in a way that seems to continue endlessly (background), and we mark the other as a closed bounded one (foreground) (cf. Cresti ch. 9).

⁸ “*The Madonna of the Goldfinch* by Raphael” (transl. by Wikipedia, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madonna_del_Cardellino. Accessed 14Aug. 2014).

⁹ “Communicative dynamism” from Firbas 135.

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The prosodic marking strategy is again triggered by specific movement paths, i.e. we get the right prosodic packaging using gestures: a *circular unbounded* movement for the *background* and a *linear bounded* gesture for the *foreground*.

Tab. 1. summarizes the correspondences among levels guiding the methodology.

Visual	Informational	Prosodic packaging	Gesture
Background / Open	Background information Specification / given concept	Background / Open (non-concluded) prosodic profile	Circular/Unbounded Linear backward/aside (as opposed to linear forward/aside)
Foreground / Closed	Focal (pushing forward the communication)	Foreground / Closed (concluded) prosodic profile	Linear /Bounded Linear forward/aside (as opposed to linear backward/aside)

Table 1.

Relations among visual, gesture, prosody, and informational dimensions.

The workflow of the reading practice runs as follows. The reader, who has already trained to divide and move the text, is asked to read aloud, choosing to alternate *backgrounds* and *foregrounds*, as he believes they happen within the text, and to embody them with the suggested gestures. Endless circular movements lead to backgrounds; bounded movements, with eventually instantaneous or incrementally endpoints, let foregrounds effectively happen. Movements naturally influence the prosody.

The parsing of the text into plans is done directly aloud with the gesture starting from a very simple basic text, and then it is fine-tuned by offering the reader paper sheets in which the text is divided according to its informational organization (with italic fonts for backgrounds and regular ones for foregrounds). Here is a short example of invented text (2.)

2. Johnny is really shy. Because is shy, he has difficulty meeting girls he likes. However, a girl he likes is looking at him now.

From the point of view of the information, it can be structured in the following manner:

Johnny is really shy.
Because *he is shy*, he has difficulty meeting girls he likes.
However *a girl he likes* **is** looking at him now.

The circular movement marks not *Johnny* as the point, but something *about* Johnny. Finally “is really shy” is the endpoint and the incoming information whose premise was Johnny, and it may be realized for example up-down linearly by a palm down open hand¹⁰ (metaphorically ‘dropping a new element in the center of the scene’), or by a palm lateral open hand, horizontally moving from the center to the outside (metaphorically ‘setting on a table something to show’).

Subsequently, the news “Johnny is shy” becomes the background of “he has difficulty [...]”. “Because he is shy” may be realized with an elliptical gesture that metaphorically seems to take out of the scene the previous element to introduce the new one (girls).

¹⁰ For the *open hand prone* (‘palm down’) and the *open hand supine* (‘palm up’) gesture families cf. Kendon, *Gesture* ch. 13.

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Immediately after, again, the introduced topic of the girls becomes the background. “However, a girl he likes” may have a circular palm up open hand movement (like ‘having something in the hands that must be weighed and analyzed’). Finally, the new “is looking at him now” may have the linear movement of the opening of the hand from a ‘finger bunch’ form¹¹ (all fingers together joining at their tips) to a palm open form, metaphorically signaling ‘the turning on of a light’.¹² It doesn’t matter if the mentioned gestures are overtly expressed or slightly outlined; their energy would be kept to the voice and the willingness to communicate, and we must let this happen in reading.

After having practiced on a basic text, the reader can move on to more complex ones. To do this, the empirical gestural model offers some implementations: for example, linear movements *forth* and *back* to the center space in front of the reader serve to realize informational patterns in the non-prototypical foreground-background order; as well as movements of hands *on one side* and then *on the other* (left-right) of the speaker may signal two different points of view.

Let’s see how the technique could function to perform a piece of literature with syntactically difficult passages (3.). The example is from Proust in the Italian translation by Natalia Ginzburg:¹³

3. Già molti anni che di Combray tutto ciò che non era il teatro e il dramma del coricarmi non esisteva più per me, quando in una giornata d’inverno, rientrando a casa, mia madre, vedendomi infreddolito, mi propose di prendere, contrariamente alla mia abitudine, un po’ di tè.

The syntactic difficulty of this sentence lies in the fact that it is structured according to a rhetorical device, called *cum inversum*, for which the logical relation of the two clauses, a temporal and a main one, are inverted: the temporal subordinate clause, which usually forms the background to the main event, instead conveys the foreground of it, relegating the background expression to the independent clause:

Già molti anni che di Combray tutto ciò che non era il teatro e il dramma del coricarmi non esisteva più per me, quando [...] mia madre [...] mi propose di prendere [...] un po’ di tè.

Integrating the work with hyphens and directions with one of the informational movements, the text may be transformed as follows:

Già da molti anni – circular – di Combray – circular – tutto ciò che non era – circular – il teatro e il dramma del coricarmi – circular – non esisteva più per me, – circular – quando – (linear) forward – in una giornata d’inverno, – (linear) backward – rientrando a casa, – backward – mia madre, – forward – vedendomi infreddolito, – backward – mi propose di prendere, – forward – contrariamente alla mia abitudine, – backward – un po’ di tè. – forward –

As we already saw in par. 4. the hyphen helps to realize the flow of thoughts through constituents. Meanwhile, the kind of movements added in this second step of the technique, circular or linear, give the two plans of the event. In the first part, the circular-linear pattern helps to realize the difficult background given by the independent clause. Then, the back-

¹¹ *Bunch, cluster* (Kendon’s translation from the Italian term *grappolo*; see Kendon, *Gesture* 228).

¹² As you can see, the suggested movements, linear and circular, are already presented here in more defined forms, which however will be better illustrated and explained in par. 6.

¹³ Proust, *La strada di Swann* 49.

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and-forth gesturing variation allows to keep highlighted the focus while additional retrograde information is given.

So, with this second step, space and path are strengthened as well as the notion of the depth of the flow. In this way, the complex structure of language is embodied and practiced as well.

6. Third Step: 'Painting' the Reading

The first and second steps have allowed the reader to perform the text, integrating its informational structure to achieve a prosodic interpretation that is coherent with the background and foreground plans of the text. The objective of the third step is to give rise to its climax: i.e., the value transmitted by the story to the listener (Batson: ch. 21).

The reader must actualize the climax of the eventualities reported in his telling. The technique faces this objective within the group activities and tries to reach a substantial agreement among participants. The tool is again to exploit the expressive potential of gestures when coordinated with the actions mentioned in the narration.

The movements in space and the linear or circular movements must develop in gestures specifically anchored in the *telic* or *atelic* nature of the events reported in the reading.

Some background notions are needed to see the link between gesture and aspectual properties.

As for language, Vendler's classification (ch. 4) distinguishes between verbs for their aspectual features. The atelic actions are of two types: *state* and *activity*, both not having an endpoint; meanwhile, the telic are: *accomplishment* and *achievement*, both having an endpoint, but crucially differing because in the first type, the endpoint is gradually incrementally reached up, while in the second it occurs instantaneously.

As for gesture, the *stroke* is the meaningful part of a gesture given by a distinct peak of effort, i.e. its imagistic expression. According to McNeill's psychological model (Gesture and Thought ch. 4), in language, the relation between the sound and the meaning is conventionally and arbitrarily mapped; in the gesture, on the contrary, the form is motivated and inhabits the meaning.¹⁴

As Mittelberg explains, "cognitive-semiotic principles – such as iconicity, indexicality, metaphor, metonymy, and image schemata – interact in motivating and structuring multimodal messages and performances" (755).

So, in our technique, the propulsive energy of gesture-motivated forms can be used to highlight the different plans of the information structure, together with the telic-atelic quality of the actions resulting from the entire excursus of the gestural movements.

Returning to Proust's pages, let's see how verbs and gestures may guide the reading, following suggestions provided by the coach, with one short example considering the foreground parts of (3):

quando [...] mia madre [...] mi propose di prendere [...] un po' di tè.

The 'quando' ('when') makes the action sudden and instantaneous. The aspectual characteristic of *achievement* can be realized by the movement in par. 5 from the bunch to palm open hand titled 'light up,' repeated in each of the four segments in which the foreground is articulated. The four 'illuminating' pulses of the hand contribute to expressing the sudden change given by the temporal clause in the vocal realization of the reading, and,

¹⁴ McNeill, *Hand and Mind* 23.

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thanks to repetition, they make the sentence cohesive despite the alternation with the background units.

This is just one example of what can be done to make the ‘embodied’ text, which already has acquired spatial consistency, actualize the climax of what it is being told.

Moving from the academic world of linguistics to the performative world of theatre, it is interesting to point out how communicative success, which is that of ‘making information happen,’ goes hand in hand with theatrical success, which, according to Stanislavskij’s system is that of ‘making the event happen.’

7. Conclusion

If the utterance performance is inherently multimodal and dynamic, reading aloud skills must take into account multimodality. The methodology we sketched is based on heuristic key passages targeting the use of the whole body, understood as a generator of significant dynamic movements. The overall hypothesis of the reading technique, briefly illustrated here, not by chance titled “reading with the body”, is that the integration of gestures into reading finally recruits the meaning and determines its full expression and reception by the audience. The specific methodology developed activates body movements that involve the concept of space, directions, paths, multidimensionality, and grammatical aspects such as phrase, information structure, aspectuality, and actionality. From this perspective, the intonations are completely revisited and no longer seen as sound repertoires, but as configurational movements of cognitive paths. The approach is experiential and process-oriented.

Following the theatrical *Stanislavskij’s system*, the assessment of the results must be seen in terms of ‘event’. Accordingly, the success of the communicative performance is when the information happens, generating fulfillment in the speaker and clarity in the audience. It is a question of giving the narrative the discursive roots, which alone can bring out its complete spatio-temporal dimension and make it fully experienced by an audience (even by a single reader in his own mind).

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