

On the multimodal metaphor „Dance is Language“

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Abstrakt

The paper examines relation between dance and language in a multimodal metaphor „Dance is Language“. Author points out complex relations between domain of dance and domain of language in metaphorical mapping. The use of multimodal metaphor „Dance is Language“ is considered on the background of structuring natural discourse. Author intends to reconsider the role of dance in explaining the differences and commonalities between the structure of everyday language and the qualitative kynamic dynamics of dance performance.

1 Introduction

Past decades have brought an inspiring revival in the study of the cognitive and neural foundations of dance. Number of interdisciplinary research projects bringing together dance artists, philosophers and scientists have been launched. This rapprochement between dance and science carries the prospect of not only enriching our status and knowledge of dance, but also of language. Moreover, it deepens our understanding of the complexity and mutual interdependence of embodiment, experience and emergence of meaning in language, dance and overall behaviour of a man.

2 From movement to dance

Our capacity to understand other person's actions in everyday situations allows us to understand movements that resemble everyday action in dance. Humans perceive the world as divided into objects scenes and events. The segmentation appears to be automatic, the brain continuously generates predictions of the next scene or an event. It has been experimentally shown, that people tend to segment scenes on former knowledge of scene schemas. Similar processes enable us to segment a dance performance into discrete scenes as for example in classical ballet, tango or contemporary dance (Hagenhoorn, 2004). Schemas are at work in the mind of the observer as well as the artist.

2.1 Multimodal metaphors

Conceptual metaphors conceived of as mapping from one domain to another (Lakoff, Johnson) can be

applied both to language and dance. Metaphorical mapping between the domain of the *target* – Dance and the domain the *source* – Language reflects a wide range of differences as well as commonalities. For D. Humphrey “[a] good dance should be put together with phrases, and [a] phrase has to have a recognisable shape, with a beginning and an end, rises and falls in its over-all line, and differences in length for variety” (Humphrey, 1959, p.68). A phrase has a structure, a beginning and an end. The classical ballet vocabulary, e.g. consists of numerous movements and positions which can be combined in an infinite number of ways, although various rules (mostly implicit) restrict the ways in which movements can be performed just as the rules of grammar limit the number of correct phrases.

2.2 Dance – poetry of human motions

Multimodal metaphor Dance is Language highlights the fact that dance employs gesture to express and communicate intention and emotion. People gesture when they speak, raise their fists in anger, shrug their shoulders in doubt, jump with joy and use elaborate body movements to make themselves clear. In natural language the word language includes the usage of language-related notions such as speaking, writing, words, phrases, vocabulary, grammar, syntax, poetics and so on, each of which may draw attention to a specific analogy. If a piece of choreography is viewed as a set of instructions that specifies the actions of the dancers, we might similarly speak of a certain choreographer's choreographic language.

3 Phenomenology of kinesthesia

Sheets-Johnstone points out a need for a phenomenological analysis of movement in conjunction with the question of “quality” in movement. She elaborates on the concept of „emergence of meaning in dance” where “meaning” emanates from the *qualitative kinetic dynamics* that constitute any particular dance. Anyone unfamiliar with what is involved in choreographing a dance, in training to be a dancer, and in either learning a piece of choreography or participating in a form of improvisation will be at a loss of experience. The person will have a gap in his or her understanding of “the acquisition and performance of dance” and will

lack intimate knowledge of how a movement's "quality" is related to "observable movement parameters".

4 Summary

One segments a dance performance into scenes, events and actions, which then become the equivalents of phrases, paragraphs and chapters. Movements and scenes, like sentences and stories can have a literal and a metaphorical meaning. One's own schema based on individual experience and expectation determine how one views schemas within a dance performance. R. Collingwood argued that all kinds of language have a relation to bodily gesture – painting, drawing and music f. i. imply the movements of the artist's or musician's hand – and that "in this sense it may be said that the dance is the mother of all languages" (Collingwood, 1958, p.244).

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