Different Tropes for Different Folks
‘Style’ in BSL Poetry

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Style in Sign Poetry

- **Narrative** style: e.g. choice of theme, framing, voice, point of view
- **Figurative** (or “Literal”) style: e.g. metaphor, simile, allegory, allusion, anthropomorphism,
- **Signing** style: e.g. choice of vocabulary, choice of parameters, use of space, size and speed of signing, non-manual features
- **Performance** style: e.g. use of ‘stage’ space, engaging with the audience
Background

- Rapid development of BSL poetry since 2005
- Development of analytical frameworks
- ‘BSL poetry anthology’ (University of Bristol, 2010) = a large collection of BSL poems, enabling both qualitative and quantitative approach (www.bristol.ac.uk/bslpoetryanthology)

We are now ready to explore different styles and genres that exist within BSL poetry.
Metaphor in Creative Sign Language project

This is the first large-scale collection of on-line BSL poetry and short stories, created at the University of Bristol as part of research on metaphor in creative sign language.

Poet corner
Find out more about the poets who have been so generous with their time to help us with this project.

News

Bristol Sign Poetry Festival 2011
24 Feb 11
The Four Poets

- Dorothy Miles
- Paul Scott
- Richard Carter
- Donna Williams
Dorothy Miles

- 1931-1993
- Born hearing, English as first language
- Pioneer of sign language poetry
- Years active: 1970s -1993
Paul Scott

- Age: mid 40s
- Deaf school, BSL as first language
- Acknowledged poet in British Deaf community
- Years active: late 1980s -
Richard Carter

- Age: early 40s
- Deaf school, BSL as first language
- Established and experienced poet
- Years active: 1999 -
Donna Williams

• Age: late 20s
• Education: mainstreamed, English as first language
• Years active: 2006 -
A collage of their styles

• We do not offer any statistical analysis of their styles, but rather comment on the sort of areas we might look at, giving first impressions of the features of their work
• We present a brief selection of their poetry
• www.bristol.ac.uk/bslpoetryanthology
Narrative Style
Choice of theme

- All Four poets – **Deaf identity**
  - Deaf community, celebration of sign language
  - wider, more symbolic themes
  - Deaf/gay identity, relationships
  - general, less Deaf-focused
Framing
(“Frame Semantics” Fillmore 1982)

mixed

‘collage’ – conceptual blending of different narrative frames

single-linear-coherent frame

contrastive narrative of personal experiences
Voice and point of view

- allegorical narrative with the poet as narrator
- mixed
- fictional narrative told in characters’ voice
- narrative of personal experiences through “Poetic-I”
Figurative Style
Preferred Tropes

- overt metaphor, simile, allegory
- mixed/unresolved metaphor, allusion
- anthropomorphism
- juxtaposition (analogy & contrast)
Allegory
Anthropomorphism
Overt metaphor, simile, analogy
Allusion
Signing and Performance Style
General

- manipulation of lexical signs, strong tie with the audience
- manipulation of sublexical features
- constructed actions, cinematographic effects (speed, zoom-in/out)
- poetically significant placement of referents
Vocabulary

more exposure to English → use of established lexicon
Less transparent

strong BSL users → more visual and productive signs
More transparent (closer to “visual vernacular”)
Diction

- Selection and arrangement of words
  - “formal” (scholarly & lofty)
  - “informal” (relaxed but educated)
  - “slang” (newly-coined words, other terms not accepted in formal use)
  - “colloquial” (used in everyday speech)
Segmentation

- Short, discrete signs or longer segments
  - segmented
  - mixed
  - longer segments
  - strongly segmented
Eyegaze

- Gaze to the audience (narrator’s role)
- Mixture
- Character’s gaze (immersed in the story)
- Gaze of Poetic-I (not constantly acknowledging the audience)
Summary

• All four poets have different styles in delivering their poetic discourse.
• Age, education and linguistic background can (partially) explain their differences.
• Analysing different styles provides a critical perspective which cannot be obtained by studying a single poet. It clarifies and diversifies the potential of sign language poetry.
• www.bristol.ac.uk/bslpoetryanthology
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• www.bristol.ac.uk/bslpoetryanthology