Sense from Nonsense:
A Linguistic and Literary Analysis of Two ASL Translations of *Jabberwocky*

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Abstract*

This thesis investigates two American Sign Language (ASL) translations of *Jabberwocky*. Through a linguistic analysis of the novel word forms in these translations, I highlight key differences in the methods available for creating word forms in English and ASL. Specifically, I show that the translators use three primary methods to translate *Jabberwocky*'s nonsense words: sign creation, classifier constructions, and visual vernacular. Sign creation is directly analogous to some techniques used both in the English original and in several translations to other spoken languages. However, the latter methods appear only in the sign language translations, suggesting that modality has an impact on the elements used in the composition of literary works.

A discussion of the history of the American Deaf community and of ASL literature informs the context in which the poem was translated and the goals of the translators. The Deaf community's history of oppression can be seen as parallel to the struggles of other minority language or dialect communities to gain recognition for and legitimize their way of speaking. The translation of works from a high-status language serves as a means to confer status upon the language and the community (Brissett 1990). Understanding the cultural environment in which the translators worked illuminates differences between the translations and explains some of the translators' linguistic choices.

In addition, a comparison of several prominent proposed frameworks for the analysis of lines in sign language poetry underscores the importance of modality. An analysis based on Valli's (1987) model shows little association between line breaks in *Jabberwocky* and their proposed sign language correlates in the ASL translations. Bauman's (2003) model, based on film theory, seems better suited to describing the structure of the ASL translations of *Jabberwocky*. Most analysis of sign language poetry focuses on comparisons to written poetry. Using a translated work therefore allows a directly comparative analysis, highlighting both the similarities and the distinct features of each language and modality, and suggesting what might be some universal features of language-based art.

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1. Introduction

*Jabberwocky* was written by Lewis Carroll in 1871, as part of the book Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There. The poem has been translated into numerous languages, and its translation, like other translations of works that incorporate nonsense, highlights linguistic features of the language into which it's translated. This paper is concerned with the analysis of two translations of *Jabberwocky* into American Sign Language (ASL), the primary language of many Deaf people in North America. I will begin by discussing the challenges presented by translation, and in particular the linguistic challenges present in translation of *Jabberwocky* and other works that incorporate elements of nonsense. After a brief review of the history of ASL and of ASL literature, I will focus specifically on issues in sign linguistics that impact cross-modality translation of literature, using a close analysis of two ASL translations of *Jabberwocky*, one by Eric Malzkuhn and one by Lou Fant, in order to examine the linguistic techniques that they use in translation. This analysis will illuminate important issues in sign language literature and give insight
into the effect of modality on sign language performance art.

2. Jabberwocky in English

2.1. Linguistics of Nonsense in English

Nonsense literature has a long history within the English language, but it rose in prominence in the Victorian era with writers such as Carroll and Edward Lear. Since then, it has remained a vital part of the literary scene (Orero 2007). Nonsense has a variety of types, but is generally regarded as distinct from gibberish, in that nonsense retains either vocabulary or syntax intact, while gibberish preserves neither. Further, there are a number of types of nonsense; because only one type occurs in Jabberwocky, we will restrict our analysis to that type only: the appearance of “a nonsense word within a meaningful syntactic unit” (Orero 2007: 35). I will use the terms neologism, nonsense word and novel word interchangeably, in all cases meaning a word that does not have a dictionary entry and is not recognizable outside its context. Jabberwocky makes use of this particular type of nonsense form, and it is the specific translation techniques for this type that I will look at, both for other spoken languages and for ASL.

Numerous scholars and translators have attempted to ascertain the origin and etymology of unfamiliar words in the poem. Carroll himself had at times offered explanations of some of the words in the poem (Imholtz 1987: 213), and Humpty Dumpty later offers Alice the meanings of the first two stanzas' novel words in the context of the book, but both are thought to be “meant for humor and only partially relevant” (Orero 2007: 149). This is particularly evident from Carroll's multiple, often conflicting explanations of the same word. It seems, then, that there is no consensus as to the intended meaning or etymology of any particular word; for example, conflicting explanations of “vorpal” assert that the word is a combination of “verbal” and “gospel”, or, alternately, “voracious” and “narwhal” (Imholtz 1987: 217). Some of Carroll's words are undoubtedly portmanteaus, or words created by combining several existing words, while others are simply neologisms that are not composed exclusively of elements of existing words. In the absence of any authoritative source on each word's origin, and considering that readers are unlikely to unilaterally recognize portmanteaus as such, I will consider speculation on the etymologies of novel words to be outside the scope of this thesis, and will instead focus solely on the linguistic factors that contribute to the reader's understanding of their semantic content, and on how this affects translation.

2.2. The Poem in English: Linguistic Analysis

The poem is relatively brief, measuring 28 lines divided into seven stanzas, the last of which is a verbatim repetition of the first. Of the 166 total words in the poem, 43 do not have dictionary entries or associated meanings in English; Carroll used a total of 29 unique invented words over the course of the poem. The poem is available in its entirety in the appendix, along with the line numbers. The poem's invented words, by definition, are devoid of meaning outside of their context: they “retain a semblance of linguistic form, but [are] empty of concrete content” (Orero 2007: 4). It should be noted that all of Carroll's novel words obey the phonological rules of well-formedness for English words, despite not being included in the lexicon. However, they quickly become meaningful units of language when embedded in the poem. Carroll accomplishes this by exploiting several linguistic features of English, both phonological and morphosyntactic.

Most of the novel words evoke some sense of meaning; that is, if English-speaking readers of the poem were to have to guess what the words meant, they would likely agree on some general attributes of the entities referred to by the invented words. In some cases, this is possible because the word that Carroll chose has some phonological segment in common with a real word that evokes a certain meaning. If there are already a number of words with shared phonological elements and shared semantic value, this association becomes even stronger. One common example of this phenomenon in English is the series of words drip, drop, drape, and droop, all of which have meanings associated with a downward motion. A novel word “drap” will therefore probably be interpreted as having some sort of downward motion associated with it as well. Examples of the “phonological baggage” of some of Carroll's invented words include “slithy” (line 1), which shares its initial consonant cluster with such words as slimy, slippery and slither, evoking a sense of moisture and smooth motion that is not entirely pleasant. Similarly, “galumphing” (line 20) shares enough phonology with galloping that in context, the reader is likely to interpret the word as describing the hero's motion. These phonesthemes provide a way for Carroll to suggest meaning and to connect the novel words to patterns
in the language while still preserving the invented nature of the new words.

Carroll also exploits English morphological patterns in order to form plausible invented words. For instance, many English adjectives end in -ious, such as pious, laborious, curious, delicious. Therefore, when the reader sees the word “frumious” (line 8), he or she will likely conclude that the word is an adjective, based in part on its internal composition. The same process occurs with the adjective suffix -ish, which yields “beamish” (line 13) and “uffish” (line 22). Likewise, the presence of -ing in the nonsensical words “whiffling” (line 15) and “galumphing” (line 20) prompts the reader to interpret the stem morpheme as a verb and the resulting word as a gerund.

The way the novel words are placed within their sentential context also contributes to our ability to parse Jabberwocky as a coherent narrative, based on our understanding of syntax. For instance, Carroll takes advantage of the fact that English adjectives typically immediately precede the nouns that they modify. Therefore, an unknown word that precedes a noun will be interpreted as an adjective, as in the case of the “manxome foe” (line 10). Another case that we see where the linguistic context primes the recognition of novel words is in “gyre and gimble” (line 2), where the presence of the auxiliary verb “did,” and the lack of another verb in the sentence, cues the reader to interpret the new words as verbs.

As we look at translations of Jabberwocky, our understanding of the techniques that Carroll uses in English will provide insight into the extent to which the translators use similar techniques. This will allow us to identify linguistic properties of the language into which they are translating, or “target language”, which may have restricted or motivated their choices.

3. Written Translations of Jabberwocky

3.1. Linguistic and Cultural Issues in Translation

The discipline known as translation studies has emerged in the last century as a unified field concerned with the linguistic, cultural and literary issues pertaining to translation, typically literary translation. Scholars of translation theory have conducted extensive debates in an attempt to determine when it is appropriate for the translator to deviate from a literal translation, how far he or she may deviate, and which methods are best employed to solve the problems that inevitably arise in attempting to render an artistic work in a language with an entirely different grammar, lexicon, and culture. The question of cultural equivalence is also prevalent -- if translating from Russian to English, does one leave the Russian name Anya, or change it to the more familiar American name Anna? Should one still have the characters drink vodka, or should they instead drink beer or whiskey? Most importantly, translators often encounter material in the source language which is ambiguous, or which could be interpreted in multiple ways, as when a “bank” in English could simultaneously refer to the side of a river and to a financial institution; it is unlikely that there will be a word in the target language that is equally able to convey both meanings. In the case of Jabberwocky, which incorporates words that are open to interpretation in multiple ways, translators are forced to make many difficult choices about which sounds and associations in the target language might evoke the same response in the reader as the English nonsense word. (Brissett 1990)

Aside from the purely linguistic issues involved in translating to or from any language, the act of translating literature can be regarded as a political statement. The existence of translations of the literary canon in a certain language elevates the social status of that language, or perhaps even gives it the status of language in the first place, in effect proving that the language is capable of expressing all the complexity found in a canonical work of literature. This means that translation might occur even in instances where it could be deemed “unnecessary.” Québéquois, for instance, is mutually intelligible with French, meaning that its speakers are able to understand texts written in or translated into French. However, a recent movement to claim the language as separate from French and as an equally capable target language for the translation of classic literary works has motivated the translation of Macbeth and other works into Québéquois. Whereas Québéquois has previously been regarded as a dialect of French, suitable only for everyday conversation and not for the “higher” purposes of literature and official communication, the act of translation serves to legitimize Québéquois as a language and therefore plays an important role in a social movement. (Brisset 1990).

The cultural conditions surrounding the ASL translations of Jabberwocky were similar. Though ASL and English are
not mutually intelligible, most ASL speakers also have at least some familiarity with English and are therefore capable, in many cases, of accessing English-language literature without translation. However, at the time when *Jabberwocky* was being translated, ASL had only recently been declared a language. As a result, the Deaf community still felt the need to assert and affirm its status as a legitimate language with the same capabilities as any prestigious language such as English. The National Theatre for the Deaf, in its early years, pioneered much of this in its translations of dramatic works. Tyger Tyger, the performance in which the first *Jabberwocky* translation was debuted, specifically showed that even the literary genre of poetry, which for many hearing people is inextricably sound-based, could be translated into ASL.

3.2. *Jabberwocky*'s Translation into Other Spoken Languages

*Jabberwocky* has been translated into numerous other spoken languages. As a result of the unique challenges noted above, *Jabberwocky* “has become a test of their virtuosity in this field” (Orero 2007: vi). Spoken language translators typically engage in approaches similar to Carroll's when translating novel words. They may preserve the word almost in its entirety, modifying only the morphological elements such as suffixes to align the word's form with their language. This yields, for instance, Spanish translations of borogoves such as borogova, burgovo, borgove, borogobio, and borogovo (Orero 2007: 118).

In other cases, they guess as to an association that the word might have in English (relying on Humpty Dumpty's explanation or on their own intuition), and attempt to create a similar effect in their own language. This method produces Spanish translations of slithy such as blendes, viscotivas, agiliscosos, flexosos, viscoleantes, and agilmosas, in which English speakers, even those naïve to Spanish, might still be able to pick out relations to the roots of the English words agile, flexible, or viscous. Occasionally the translator will choose a real word in the target language, such as one translator's rendering of frabjous as feliz (the Spanish word for happy). As we will see later, Malzkuhn and Fant use many of the same techniques in their ASL renderings. Though some are unavailable to them because of ASL’s modality, other techniques unavailable to spoken-language translators are used to great effect in the ASL translations.

4. Two ASL Translations of *Jabberwocky*: Context

4.1. History of ASL Literature

American Sign Language (ASL) is a fully formed natural human language, possessing grammatical complexity comparable to that of any spoken language, though its manual/visual modality contributes to some key differences in grammatical structure. ASL is the primary language of the Deaf community in the United States and most of Canada. The language is believed to have originated at the American School for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut, where Laurent Clerc's Old French Sign Language came into contact with the homesign systems of students from across the United States, and with Martha's Vineyard Sign Language (Frishberg 1975: 699). Founded in 1817 by Thomas Gallaudet, the school was the first of its kind in the United States, and its graduates established numerous other schools throughout the country, bringing with them the newly-forming standardized language that developed at the American School for the Deaf.

Little is known about the exact forms of ASL literature in the nineteenth century, though there is substantial indication that folklore, stories, puns and other art forms were developing within the community (Rose and Nelson 2006: 242). The first filmed record of sign language performance is George Veditz' 1913 film *The Preservation of Sign Language*, which included several original stories and speeches, as well as a number of translated songs and poems. It is worth noting that although original ASL poems and stories existed at the time of Veditz' filming, ASL had not yet received recognition as a language in its own right, and the term “literature” was therefore reserved for pieces translated from English into ASL. Veditz' film, though influential, was the only film of sign language produced in the first half of the twentieth century, and the technology of film was still unavailable to the vast majority of Deaf people. The nineteenth century and the early twentieth century are therefore known as the “pre-videotape” period in ASL literature (Rose 1992: 49).

Before the advent of videotape, ASL was a face-to-face or “oral” culture, meaning that poems, jokes, folk tales and stories were passed through the community by means of performance, rather than by writing. Though “oral” is the
widely used term when referring to non-literate hearing traditions, “face-to-face” is a more accurate term to describe the nature of interactions in the Deaf community, and avoids confusion with “oralism,” the belief unpopular in the Deaf community that deaf people should learn to speak and read speech as their primary mode of communication. The Deaf community in this period could not be called a purely face-to-face culture, as its members were mostly literate to some degree in English and had significant contact with the hearing, English-speaking majority culture. However, during this period, ASL literature was only accessible through live performance. This “oral-literate continuum” is also a feature of many oral cultures, and as a consequence ASL literature shares many elements with oral literatures (Bahan 2006: 22). As Okpewho outlines, the literatures of oral cultures share common stylistic elements, including repetition, parallelism, piling (or the association of previous narrative elements with newly introduced ones), imagery, allusion, and symbolism -- all elements found in abundance in early ASL literature (Bahan 2006). Ong (1982) characterized oral literatures as additive, aggregative, repetitive, homeostatic, empathetic and agonistically toned, participatory, situational, and dealing with subject matter close to the human lifeworld. Some of these constraints are imposed by the limitations of the medium of live performance itself. For instance, if all literature must be committed to memory in order to survive, the storytellers will tend towards mnemonic devices such as repetition and parallelism.

ASL literature still embodies many of the literary elements of oral cultures. With the advent of videotape, however, more recent work has moved away from some of these constraints, with newer poets publishing their works on DVD. Newer authors can create one definitive performance of a poem, and their viewers can watch it multiple times in exact replica. The emergence of affordable and widely available video editing technology, especially that on the personal computer, has also empowered some artists to infuse post-production techniques such as special effects and editing into their works. Though live performances of ASL literature are still common, they are no longer the only way to interact with literature, and this distancing of the performer from the audience has created significant changes in ASL poetry (Bahan, personal communication). The translations of Jabberwocky, created at the beginning of the post-videotape period, still reflect some of the elements of oral cultures, but also take advantage of the medium of videotape in ways that are inconsistent with oral cultures, showing the shift of ASL literature away from a face-to-face paradigm.

4.2. History of ASL Translations of Jabberwocky

In this thesis, I will analyze two ASL translations of Jabberwocky. The first is Joe Velez' performance of Jabberwocky, as translated by Eric Malzkuhn. Malzkuhn's collaboration with Velez arose as part of the National Theatre for the Deaf's (NTD) 1968 production Tyger Tyger, so named because it included a translation of William Blake's poem of that title. Tyger Tyger incorporated a number of poems and other works translated into ASL, but no works that had been composed originally in ASL. It would not be until 1973, with the production entitled My Third Eye, that NTD would perform any works composed in ASL, rather than translated from English. As previously discussed, proponents of emerging languages see translation as a legitimizing force, perhaps explaining NTD's initial focus on translated works. (Bahan 2010)

Though Malzkuhn had been performing Jabberwocky at schools and Deaf clubs for many years prior to the making of the performance analyzed in this paper, no videotaped record exists of these earlier performances (Bahan 2010). The only videotape of Malzkuhn performing the poem is part of a 1994 performance in the Live at SMI! series. That performance differs significantly from Velez' performance, and Malzkuhn explains in an introduction that each of his performances of the poem was unique, depending on the context, his mood and the audience (Malzkuhn 1994). Though Malzkuhn was physically unable to perform for Tyger Tyger due to polio, he worked extensively with Velez to ensure that Velez' performance was true to his intent (Malzkuhn 1994). In contrast to his own performances, he and Velez worked extensively to develop and “freeze” a single version of the poem for videotape. I am choosing to analyze Velez' performance, rather than Malzkuhn's, because Malzkuhn intended that version to be the canonical translation. It is also interesting to note the role that videotape played in the development of Jabberwocky: the presence of videotape inspired Malzkuhn to rehearse and develop a set version of the translation, removing the close relationship and responsiveness between the performer and the audience.

I will also analyze a translation of Jabberwocky by Lou Fant. Fant was one of the founding members of NTD; in fact, he introduces Velez' performance. Several years later, he chose to create a DVD with his own translation of Jabberwocky, geared more towards children and with a more theatrical focus than Malzkuhn's. Because he was first exposed to Malzkuhn's translations, and may even have collaborated with Malzkuhn and Velez in some capacity, the
translations are quite similar. However, Fant does make some markedly different choices, and comparative analysis in these cases is useful in considering the linguistic possibilities available to both translators. It should be noted that other poets have since translated or performed *Jabberwocky* in ASL, namely Patrick Graybill and Paul Johnston (Graybill 2010). However, neither of these poets' work is publicly available and those translations are therefore not included in this analysis.

In this historical context, where ASL poetry was still in its infancy, creating a compelling translated work was an important endeavor. By translating a respected piece of literature into ASL, the translator proves that ASL is capable of complexity equal to that of English master works. Though more recent ASL literature has deemphasized parallels to English, studying translation gives us a unique opportunity to look at the same corpus of words in multiple languages, affording us a more direct opportunity to compare between signed and spoken languages. In addition, the transitional period in which these performances took place enables us to examine ways in which the cultural and linguistic climate at the time might have influenced the translators' choices. While Malzkuhn was translating during NTD's first theatrical season, at a time when ASL literature had yet to be proved legitimate, Fant was working several years later and was not part of a larger project of literary translation. Rather, Fant was producing the video to appeal largely to children, at a time when ASL was more established as a language, and his goals in translation were therefore significantly different from Malzkuhn's.

5. *Jabberwocky* in ASL

5.1. Linguistics

5.1.1. Sign Linguistics

Sign poetry gains much of its effect from manipulations of the linguistic processes used in everyday speech. Therefore, a review of linguistic studies outlining some basic mechanisms for novel word formation as well as some of the general properties of signed languages will illuminate and place in context many of Malzkuhn and Fant's poetic techniques. Though some of the following literature concerns British Sign Language (BSL) rather than ASL, the phonological principles discussed are likely to hold, with perhaps minor modifications, when applied to other signed languages, including ASL. In my discussion I will adopt the convention of representing ASL signs with a semantically equivalent English word in all-capital letters.

Many linguists have noted that iconicity, or the tendency of the form of signs to bear some resemblance to the meaning, is much more prevalent in sign languages than its aural equivalent, onomatopoeia, is in spoken languages (Vigliocco 2005). This is likely a result of the well-suitedness of the visual modality and of the hands as articulators in producing recognizable iconic images, compared to the relative paucity of easily pronounceable onomatopoetic sounds. However, there is also some evidence that the relative youth of most sign languages is a factor. Frishberg shows the tendency of iconic signs to become increasingly arbitrary over time, largely in order to effect phonological reduction to a less marked and more easily pronounceable form (2005). Based solely on this research, we might expect to see iconicity disappear entirely if sign languages are given much more time to develop and evolve. There is also some evidence that signers are more attuned to visual imagery than are spoken-language users, though priming can erase this effect (Vigliocco 2005).

In everyday signing, iconicity is often what one might call vestigial -- no longer contributing to an understanding of meaning, but still present and accessible through analysis of the history or origin of the sign form. Because sign languages often evolve from a combination of gesture or homesign systems, much of the lexicon is initially based in gesture. However, as the language matures and develops, iconicity becomes unnecessary to understanding lexical items, and phonological processes begin to take signs away from their iconic roots while making them easier to pronounce. In ASL performance art, however, the iconicity that does remain is exploited for poetic effect, and is often enhanced beyond what is possible in conversational signing. For instance, the sign TREE is typically articulated as a frozen sign. In a poem, however, the sign may be modified to indicate the tree's branches bending or the tree falling over -- operations that emphasize, rather than downplay, the iconic history of the sign. This use of iconicity runs counter to the notion that iconicity is disappearing over time, and may highlight two competing constraints working in the language, one that advocates less phonologically marked non-iconic forms, and one that attempts to preserve
iconicity such that the form can be productive in performative or otherwise extraordinary speech contexts.

Classifier constructions occur in some form in many languages, but sign languages are able to utilize them in an especially extensive and productive way. Because I do not have access to translations of *Jabberwocky* into any spoken languages which use classifiers, I will only be able to discuss the role that classifiers play in the ASL translation of *Jabberwocky*; any potential similarities that might exist in a *Jabberwocky* translation into a spoken language which uses classifiers will remain outside the scope of this paper. A classifier is a context-dependent sign: it provides descriptive information and typically requires a lexical sign to specify the item or action being described.

According to Schick (1990), ASL classifiers can be divided into three major categories: CLASS, HANDLE and SASS classifiers. CLASS predicates are often thought of as the canonical classifier: they are composed of a handshape indicating the noun class of the object being described and a motion path indicating the path and manner of movement of that object. An example of this is the vehicle classifier, where a 3 handshape indicates a vehicle and the other parameters indicate its location, movement path, and orientation; such a classifier must be preceded by a sign specifying the type of vehicle (i.e. CAR, BOAT, BICYCLE). In HANDLE predicates, the handshape indicates the form that the actor's hand would take when performing the action, and the movement shows the manner in which the actor performs the action. This use of predicate type is restricted to actions performed by human actors, such as picking up a cup, shown with a C handshape. HANDLE classifiers may be preceded by an indication of what the object is, but this is not obligatory if the description is clear from context. SASS (size and shape specifier) classifiers, or descriptive classifiers, are not necessarily full predicates; they “indicate adjectival information” by describing a physical entity's size and/or shape using the hands. For instance, one could indicate the width of a pipe by using bent L (“baby C”) handshapes to specify its girth. Malzkuhn and Fant use all three types of classifiers in their translations of novel words. (Schick 1990)

ASL has a wide variety of ways to add words to its lexicon, outlined and typified by Steinbergs and O'Dea (1989). In addition to iconicity, as discussed above, some signs are formed through compounding, affixation, or reduplicative processes that act on preexisting signs. Initialization is another process that acts on preexisting signs, combining a current sign and a corresponding English letter to form a related sign. Some words enter the ASL lexicon by being borrowed from other languages, whether from other sign languages or from spoken languages (via fingerspelling). And lastly, metaphorical extension can expand the semantic range of a particular form -- as when, in English, the word blue came to signify sadness in addition to referring to the color blue. While Malzkuhn and Fant do not use all these techniques in creating new words, an understanding of the range of linguistic choices available to them informs our understanding of why they chose particular techniques over others, and perhaps the role of these techniques in poetry and other ASL performative art.

5.1.2. The Poem in ASL: Linguistic Analysis

In analyzing Malzkuhn and Fant's translations of *Jabberwocky*, I will focus on the analysis of individual word forms, to the extent that they can be distinguished. The literature on ASL syntax, and poetic ASL syntax in particular, is not sufficiently well developed to provide a coherent framework within which to analyze the translators' choices. In addition, I believe that each translation incorporates some elements of English syntax from the original poem. While the presence of these English elements is fascinating from a contextual standpoint, it precludes discussion of the work as a clear example of ASL syntax, poetic or otherwise. For ease of reference, I include the line numbers from the English poem as well as links to the ASL examples, as in no case are the signs reordered across line boundaries.

I will structure the analysis based on Carroll's 29 invented words. Rather than analyzing each word that the translators create, I follow the approach taken by Orero in her analysis of Spanish translations of *Jabberwocky* and use the source text as the basis for analysis. For each of Carroll's words, I have identified the part of speech that Carroll intended the word to be, and the method that each translator used in his translation. Sometimes, of course, the correspondences are not word-for-word, in which case I have attempted to separate out which component of the translated phrase corresponds to each written word. It should be noted that a significant irregularity in interpretation of the poem occurs in both translations. While the quotation marks in the English original suggest that the son has slain the Jabberwock, Malzkuhn and Fant both convey a narrative in which the older character is the hero. It is unclear whether this is due to artistic license or to misreading on the part of the translators; indeed, it is possible that some versions of the poem may
show the quotation marks in different places, suggesting a different sequence of events.

A particularly interesting case of translation is that of the title word of the poem, “Jabberwocky,” written as “Jabberwock” when it appears inside the body of text of the poem. Unlike any of the other novel English words in the poem, Malzkuhn chose to fingerspell this word each time it appeared. Of course, choosing to fingerspell JABBERWOCK is essentially the same as not translating it at all; given Malzkuhn's extensive work on the rest of the poem, it is certainly not the case that he was simply too lazy or couldn't be bothered to find a translation for this particular word. I believe that his deliberate choice to forego a translation serves to highlight the title word. As the only fingerspelling in the poem, the JABBERWOCK stands out to the viewer each time its name is uttered. This also creates a contrast between JABBERWOCK and every other novel word in the poem; most viewers will understand that the fingerspelled word is nonsense, and relate it to the other types of nonsense words that have been artfully translated for them. Fant, on the other hand, chose to invent a sign for JABBERWOCK, using two SASS classifiers in a standardized, abbreviated sequence to refer to the creature. His choice to use this technique rather than fingerspelling may have been affected by his audience, primarily children who are less likely to respond to fingerspelling or to be familiar with the English work. For them, it is more important to understand that the Jabberwock is a creature than it is to link the poem to the English original; the poem is also situated in the film context in a way that makes the relationship explicit elsewhere.

The technique that is most analogous to Carroll's is that of inventing a new sign that shares some phonological and structural properties with existing signs, lending some meaning to the novel combination. In order to look sufficiently similar to real signs, the novel words must be phonologically permissible in ASL, just as Carroll's novel words are all phonologically permissible in English. While many of the signs that Malzkuhn and Fant create are exaggerated (as many signs, real or otherwise, are in poetic speech), they tend to follow the linguistic rules of ASL and would be judged by ASL signers to be possible words in the language. One example of this strategy is BRILLIG (Malzkuhn, Fant) (line 1), for which Malzkuhn and Fant create different signs, both resembling the sign SHINY. Malzkuhn's is more closely related to the real sign, preserving the handshape, location and orientation and changing only the movement, while Fant preserves only the handshape and movement, but changes the location and orientation of the sign. Further examples in Malzkuhn's translation include SLITHY (line 1), which bears a great resemblance to the sign WET, and OUTGRABE (line 4), which seems to be an inflected sort of grabbing motion, linking it phonologically to GRAB. Fant uses this technique considerably more than Malzkuhn, employing it for fully half of the novel words in the English poem, while Malzkuhn uses this technique for less than a third of them. In addition, fewer of Fant's novel words seem to draw on phonetically related existing ASL signs to provide semantic content. Instead, Fant invents phonologically possible words and relies on other morphological and syntactic processes to give meaning to his created words. His translation of UFFISH (line 13) is one such example; there does not seem to be a relationship with any existing ASL sign, but the sign he creates is phonologically possible and seems like a plausible adjective.

Malzkuhn and Fant also use ASL conventions with regard to part of speech in order to clarify for the viewer which part of speech a certain sign has. For instance, Malzkuhn's OUTGRABE has a motion that is typical of verbs in its directional nature. Similarly, Fant's adjective FRUMIOUS (line 8) exhibits a straight path movement that is typical of some ASL adjectives such as THIN. These invented words, like the real signs they resemble, look as though they might have originated as descriptive classifiers of some sort. Though this type of distinction is less salient in the translations than in the English text, I attribute the difference largely to the different types of morphological processes that are present in each language. While English is heavily reliant on concatenative morphology, resulting in easily identifiable suffixes that can be attached to nonsense words, ASL relies more on nonconcatenative morphology, meaning that there are fewer discrete morphemes signaling part-of-speech that are available to the translator. It should also be noted that the boundaries are often unclear between an invented sign with similarity to an existing sign, and that existing sign itself. Malzkuhn's BEAMISH (line 22), for instance, appears identical to the sign WONDERFUL.

Another strategy that the translators used was employing classifiers as a way of translating a novel word. While English has no precise analogue to classifiers, their use seems natural in this context. As ASL poetry typically makes extensive use of classifiers, writing an ASL poem without them would be considered somewhat odd. In addition, the imprecise nature of classifiers provides a semantic analogue to the novel English words with some phonological associations; the perceiver understands in a vague way what kind of thing is being discussed, but does not have a specific lexical word to refer to for clarification. This is because, as discussed previously, classifier predicates contain
the class of object being discussed, but must be paired with nouns which specify the object in question. The absence of the specifying noun creates the same effect of underspecification as using familiar phonesthemes within unfamiliar words.

This effect is particularly applicable to CLASS predicates. The single instance of this classifier type occurs near the beginning of the poem, where GYRE and GIMBLE (Malzkuhn, Fant) (line 2) are translated as a series of motions articulated by a handshape that presumably refers to a TOVE (Malzkuhn (still image), Fant) (line 1); Malzkuhn and Fant both use this structure to represent these lines, though they choose different handshapes and motions, with Fant using secondary motion, specifically a finger wiggle, far more than Malzkuhn does in the first stanza. The viewer understands that the TOVE is a small, mobile creature engaging in an unusual movement path, but does not have enough context or information to label the creature as one previously encountered in discourse. This underspecification creates an effect similar to that of introducing a novel word.

The translators also use a single HANDLE classifier to represent a novel word: both Malzkuhn and Fant offer the same translation of the line “He took his vorpal sword in hand” (Malzkuhn, Fant) (line 9). They use a HANDLE classifier to indicate drawing the sword, modifying the manner in which the sword is drawn to indicate that the sword is not straight. We can infer, then, that VORPAL is being translated as a property of the sword that is being shown, indirectly, by a HANDLE classifier. It is unsurprising that this technique occurs only once in the translation of a novel word (though it does occur elsewhere in the poem), as its scope is limited only to actions which are performed with the hand handling an instrument.

Malzkuhn and Fant make much more extensive use of SASS classifiers, using them to introduce new items and creatures into the discourse by highlighting several salient features, such as a large nose or curly antennae. Examples of this type of classifier in Jabberwocky include Malzkuhn's descriptions of the BOROGOVES (line 3), and Fant's MOME RATHS (line 4). This technique provides the viewer some sense of the nature of the creatures, but does not elaborate sufficiently to fully introduce a new type of creature into the viewer's mental world. This technique is most prevalent in the first stanza of the poem, where Carroll is setting the scene before the plot begins in earnest. Classifiers are especially well suited to this task, as their purpose is to create compelling visual images. In one case, however, the line between methods becomes a bit unclear, when Fant uses SASS classifiers to indicate the JABBERWOCK. Because the classifiers are repeated several times throughout the poem in the same fashion, they become almost like a name sign for the creature. This mirrors a common linguistic process in ASL, whereby descriptive classifiers gradually become regularized and turn into well-formed lexical signs.

The third prominent technique that the translators use is less readily labeled; it bears some resemblance to mime or gesture, but I believe the most accurate way to describe this continuum is by Bernard Bragg's moniker of “visual vernacular.” In these examples, the translators use performative gestures that are not within the bounds of normal discourse or even of poetic speech. Rather, they are further exaggerated and share some common elements with mime. Examples of this strategy include BURBLED (Malzkuhn, Fant) (line 16), which both Malzkuhn and Fant translate as a mimetic description of what is presumably fire emerging from the Jabberwock, and Malzkuhn's CALLOOH CALLAY (line 23), where a joyous interjection is translated as excited hand-wringing. The motion is not confined to normal signing space, but rather extends throughout the signer's entire body. While this technique is somewhat further removed from the linguistic features of ASL proper, the use of this strategy is in line with Carroll's intent to have the poem exist just on the boundaries of the language itself, challenging what it means to have comprehensible language and playing with the possibilities of the modality in use (spoken/written, in Carroll's case).

5.2. Poetics and the Line in ASL Poetry

5.2.1. Frameworks for Analyzing ASL Poetry

Because sign language poetry is conveyed to the viewer via a different modality than written poetry, critical theories of written poetry are not necessarily applicable to sign poetry, and must be evaluated to determine which of their components might still be relevant to describe sign poetry. Some early theories of ASL poetry relied extensively on parallels to written poetry, while later theories compare sign language poetry to other art forms for which critical theories exist. Comparisons to classical written poetry with rhyme and meter offer some insights into the structure of
ASL poetry, while later scholars point out similarities to more modern poetry and even to film. The extent to which analogies with written poetry are successful may help us to distinguish between poetic elements that are universal, and those that are modality-specific. Here I review the development of theories of ASL poetic analysis, before conducting analysis using two representative theories to determine whether Jabberwocky provides support for their models.

Some analysts, including Klima and Bellugi (1979) and Valli (1987, 1993), compare ASL poetry to classical written poetry, using the vocabulary of meter and rhyme to analyze newly created ASL works. Because these concepts are traditionally linked to spoken language phonology, significant adaptation must be made in order to apply these terms to sign languages. In place of conventional spoken phonemes, signs are considered to be composed of several phonological components, or parameters, including handshape, movement, and location (Steinbergs and O'Dea 1989). Effects similar to rhyme, alliteration and assonance are created when the poet chooses several signs that share one or more parameters. Meter is more directly analogous to the spoken language concept, pertaining to the speed and rhythm with which the signer articulates the poem, and to the number of signs contained within each phrase. This framework also provides a way to determine line division in signed poetry using rhymes of handshape, movement path and nonmanual signals (Valli 1987). This analysis was historically key in establishing the legitimacy of sign poetry by establishing parallels to canonical written poets. However, more recent recognition of modality as an important distinguishing feature of sign poetry has led to other analyses.

Cohn proposes a different framework, one which compares ASL poets to poets in the imagist movement, such as Allen Ginsberg, e.e. cummings, and Ezra Pound. Stemming from a meeting between Ginsberg and several young Deaf poets at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, Cohn asserts that “what deaf people do with their language is what hearing poets try to make their language do” (Cohn 1986: 263). Rejecting the classical reliance on rhyme and meter as the building blocks of poetry, Cohn instead argues that ASL is uniquely suited to something that has long been a goal of the hearing poet -- creating compelling images for the viewer by combining the semantic content and the linguistic forms of the language. Because ASL poetry makes extensive use of iconicity, relying more on image-based forms than normal signing, this analysis can be compelling, especially when applied to certain poets, such as Peter Cook, whose style does not seem to conform to line-based analyses. According to imagist analyses of written poetry, iconicity is an important component of modernist poetry, with the written text arranged to suggest a variety of elements that pertain to the poem's content. These elements include sequential elements such as motion, duration and change, as well as spatial configurations such as size, shape, absence and suppression, relative position, and notional or metaphorical structures (Waswo 1985). For instance, e.e. cummings' poem r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r exhibits many of these characteristics, even in its title. Because of the way that the letters of the word grasshopper are positioned nonsequentially on the page, the “reading process follows lines of motion that provide a diagrammatic icon of the elusive, haphazard jumps and flights of a grasshopper” (Waswo 1985: 134).

More recent work has claimed that ASL poetry should not be compared to written poetry. Because of its performed, visual/spatial modality, Bauman argues that the language of film analysis is best suited to the analysis of ASL poetry. Because signed poetry makes use of space and time in a unique way, the modes of analysis for written poetry are insufficient to describe how ASL poetry progresses. However, the signer is able to blend images with abstraction to create and cut among varying shots in a way that is similar to the methods that filmmakers use. Though signing space is of a fixed size, much like a film screen, the signer can depict a shot as wide as a mountain range or galaxy, or as close-up as the tail of a small bug. The way that these shots are constructed blends film language, a recognized paralinguistic syntax used to create a well-formed narrative, and sign language itself, with signs alternately acting as components of the image and as purveyors of linguistic content (Bauman 2003). Bahan, however, characterizes the “cinematographic story” as a single type or genre within ASL literature, and does not view film-based analysis as universally applicable to other genres, though he recognizes the effect of film technique in some other stories. He also notes that we do not have any record of sign literature from the pre-film period, meaning that it is difficult to know whether the film-like techniques in ASL literature predated the film industry itself, or whether they arose as a result of the artists' exposure to film (Bahan 2006).

5.2.2. ASL: Analysis of Poetic Structure

In addition to analysis of specific words in the poem, we can also analyze the structure of the Jabberwocky translations to determine which of the major frameworks, Valli's or Bauman's, is more relevant and applicable. Given the debate
over the nature and form of lines in ASL poetry, analysis of line and stanza structure in these translations might provide insight into the extent to which line-based analyses are applicable to signed literature. Because Jabberwocky is a translated work, we might expect it to use the framework and devices of written poetry more prominently than other types of ASL literature. However, I do not find strong support for a line-based analysis of either translation, and instead rely on more recent literature to provide a more relevant framework.

Valli argues that line breaks in ASL poetry can be analyzed by looking for rhymes; he even identifies line division rhyme as a distinct type of rhyme, separate from rhyme in handshape, movement path or non-manual signals, though it is unclear what types of rhyme (that is, which parameters) may indicate a line division (Valli 1987). Though Valli asserts that lines in ASL poetry and lines in spoken poetry are analogous, he provides no evidence beyond indicating that each form signals line divisions by rhyme, which is not true of written free verse poetry. In a translated work such as Jabberwocky, however, we have the opportunity to see firsthand whether the line breaks in the original correlate with rhymes in the translations. Although of course this does not conclusively prove the existence or absence of lines in ASL poetry, or mean that the word "line" should not be used to describe phenomena in ASL poetry, an absence of correlation with lines in written poetry indicates that caution should be used when equating the two or asserting that the existence of lines is, in fact, a similarity between signed and written poetry.

In Malzkuhn's translation, the end of a line is often marked by a pause, and occasionally by a role shift as well. However, line breaks are not always marked in this way, and he seems to disregard some line breaks entirely. In addition, pauses and role shifts occur intralinearly as well, meaning that these markers are not a reliable way to distinguish lines. For instance, in his first stanza, the end of the first line is marked by a slight pause; however, there is a pause of approximately equal length in the middle of the second line. Fant's translation is structured with many more long pauses, as well as cuts from one shot to another in the film itself. Though all stanza breaks are accompanied by a pause and change in shot, the shots also change at numerous other times, and pauses occur after every few signs for the majority of the poem, with pauses marking line breaks not noticeably longer than others.

I have also conducted an analysis of the line breaks in the English poem and catalogued the signs which coincide with these prosodic breaks by handshape and movement path, in an attempt to find any rhymes which might indicate the end of a line or stanza. In Malzkuhn's translation, I found only four instances where he employed handshape rhyme consistent with the ABAB pattern of Carroll's poem, and two instances of movement rhyme, of twelve possible pairs (see section 8.2.2). These instances do not occur mostly on the second and fourth lines of each stanza, where the rhyme is supposedly stronger (indeed, Carroll sometimes breaks the A section of the rhyming pattern). In Fant's translation, similarly, there are only five instances of handshape rhyme and one instance of movement rhyme consistent with Carroll's rhyming structure (section 8.3.2). This is not to say that the translators do not use rhyme to poetic effect, but rather that they do not use rhyme as a way to mark line breaks analogous to those in written poetry.

In contrast with the operation of line and stanza breaks in written poetry, which are always unambiguously indicated in the same fashion, extensive analysis is required to even attempt a line-based analysis of an ASL poem. And even in the case of a translated work, which was originally written with lines incorporated, the translators do not preserve this element of the poem's structure in a clear and unilateral way. Because of the historical context of the translations, especially Malzkuhn's, and because of other effects of English in his translation, as discussed elsewhere, we can conclude that the lack of line structure is not due to a rejection of English poetic or linguistic conventions. Rather, this provides strong evidence that signed poetry is not structured in lines analogous to those in written poetry, but that other structural frameworks might be better suited to the analysis of signed poetry.

An analysis of the translation based on Bauman's theory of film-based analysis reveals much clearer results. Because the poem is telling a narrative story, translators can use numerous film techniques to convey the narrative nature of the story. When describing the Jabberwock's arrival, for instance, Malzkuhn switches from a close or mid-range shot of the Jabberwock's flaming eyes to a wide shot of the tulgey wood, and then back to a mid-range shot of the Jabberwock burbling (line 14-16). Similarly, near the end of the poem, we have an extended mid-range shot of the dialogue between the two characters, from line 21-23, followed by a wide-range shot of the hero chortling, showing the movement of his whole body. This type of shift in reference frame provides a variety of perspectives from which the viewer experiences the story.
Rather than being divided into stanzas of equal length, the translation seems to be divided into five scenes: the first and last scenes coincide with the first and last stanzas, setting the scene and closing the poem by reiterating the setting, respectively. The second and fourth scenes consist of conversations between the hero and son, one before and one after the hero's adventure. Each of these four scenes is relatively short, corresponding to one stanza of Carroll's verse. The third scene, however, incorporates three stanzas, as it is the story of the hero's adventure seeking, hunting and killing the Jabberwock. So while Malzkuhn has chosen to preserve much of Carroll's structure, he is responding not to the stanza structure itself, but rather to the natural division of scenes in the narrative.

Fant's translation offers additional complexities when analyzing the presence of film-based techniques, primarily because he has chosen to use film techniques as a part of his videotaped performance of the translation. Whereas Malzkuhn's translation appears on video in the same way that it would appear to a live audience member, Fant has added cuts and changes in point of view that would not be feasible if he were to perform the translation on stage. Such effects are of course relatively new in the history of sign language literature, having been impossible before the advent of videotape. While it is debatable whether such techniques constitute part of the translation proper, they are clearly intentional artistic choices on Fant's part and I will analyze them as such. He preserves a structure similar to Malzkuhn's for the first two stanzas of the poem, with no cuts in the middle of these stanzas. However, the remainder of the poem up through line 24 is marked by a large number of changing shots -- some coinciding with a change in the "shot" in ASL, and some to show other dramatic effects. For instance, the repeated changes in shot while the hero is searching for the manxome foe presumably indicate that the hero has been moving to a variety of different locations in his search (line 10). Fant uses this deliberate blending of film techniques and linguistic techniques to show scene and shot changes in a comprehensive way. Lines 7-8, where Fant is describing the Jubjub bird and bandersnatch, for instance, are linguistically close shots to the animals and closer shots to Fant in the film, whereas the fight scene with the Jabberwock in lines 17-20 shows Fant's whole body, and depicts action on a wider scale. The way that these techniques are able to work in parallel shows the film-based nature of the composition of ASL poetry.

6. Effects of Modality on Translation

In examining why American Sign Language differs so markedly in some of its translation methods from other languages into which Jabberwocky has been translated, modality is, of course, a likely cause of many of these discrepancies. The uniquely performative nature of sign language literature, as well as the differing physiologically motivated linguistic constraints imposed by each modality, would point strongly to modality as a key cause. Unfortunately, I was unable to find any translations of Jabberwocky into other sign languages, meaning that all modality-based claims are subject to the limitations that result from gathering data from only one language in the signed modality. However, because the effects of modality are physical and physiological, we are still able to make some claims about modality and translation.

In translating nonsense works such as Jabberwocky, one key difference between written and signed translations is that written translators, particularly those whose target language has the same writing system as the source language, have the opportunity to preserve a word exactly or almost exactly as it appears in the source text, as some Spanish translators chose to do with the word "borogoves" (Oreto 2007). This is also constrained based on the phoneme inventory of each language-languages with significantly different phoneme inventories would be less able to borrow words from the source language without significant adaptation. ASL is at the extreme of this end of the spectrum, sharing no phonemes with the source language (in this case, English). Though some adaptation is possible -- Malzkuhn does in one case choose to fingerspell a word -- this technique is not one that he can regularly rely on. In other sign languages, of course, this phonological constraint will remain, meaning that the change in modality precludes any novel words from being phonologically similar to those in the source language.

Sign languages also differ from spoken languages in that they do not possess conventionalized, widely used writing systems. This means that sign language translations are inherently performative and embodied works; it is impossible to see a work of signed literature without looking at the signer's body. Because the signer's articulators are the same ones used for dance, mime and gesture, a sign language poem can more easily incorporate elements of these other art forms. Malzkuhn and Fant take advantage of this property of signed languages by choosing to translate some words using elements of mime, visual vernacular and even dance-like motion. These techniques appear often in signed performative art, but are uniquely well-suited to Jabberwocky because of their lack of specific semantic content and
their existence on the boundaries of “language”. Though it would be possible to translate Jabberwocky using only linguistic elements, I theorize that many translators working into other sign languages would also choose to make use of these additional resources afforded them by the modality.

While some spoken language works, primarily works of theatre, incorporate language elements as well as those of mime and dance, signed language works are much more readily able to do this without being formally defined as theatrical in any way. Recalling our discussion of classifiers, it is important to note that there are no clearly defined boundaries in sign language between poetry, visual vernacular, mime, and dance, though there are criteria that aid in making these judgments. Though deviating from the bounds of language proper might seem to indicate that the translators were somehow being unfaithful to the original text, this may not necessarily be the case. Because sign language has tools that are not available to spoken languages, one might wonder whether Carroll would have used some of these techniques if he were composing Jabberwocky in a sign language.

7. Conclusion

Translated works provide a unique way to study the linguistic attributes of signed poetry and to explore the similarities and differences between signed and written modalities for creating poetry. A thorough understanding of the linguistic and cultural factors contributing to the translators' choices is essential in order to distinguish purely linguistic choices from those that might be otherwise motivated. With these circumstances in mind, however, we can explore the nature of word formation and the nature of poetic form in signed poetry, gaining insight into how the language works and how we can best analyze and understand signed poetry, and into the modality-dependent differences between written and signed poetry. Only through this kind of analysis can we hope to discover what is universal in linguistics and in poetry.

8. Appendix

8.1. Jabberwocky in English

Jabberwocky

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

“Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!

“He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought--
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

And as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! and through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.
“And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!”
He chortled in his joy.

’Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

8.2. Translation of Invented Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Invented words</th>
<th>Part of Speech</th>
<th>Translation Technique (M)</th>
<th>Translation Technique (F)</th>
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<td>invented sign (related to BRIGHT)</td>
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<td>adjective</td>
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<td>SASS</td>
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<td>SASS</td>
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</table>

8.3. Eric Malzkuhn's Translation

8.3.1. Handshape and Movement Path Rhyme
### 8.4.1. Handshape and Movement Path Rhyme

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<th>Movement path</th>
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<td>flat O</td>
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<td>S</td>
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<td>C, B</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>claw</td>
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<td>came</td>
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<td>back</td>
<td>flat O</td>
<td>straight back/arc (HMH)</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>hook</td>
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<td>flat O</td>
<td>straight up/out</td>
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<td>O, 5</td>
<td>straight up/out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>joy</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>circle</td>
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</table>

Total Handshape rhymes: 4

Total Movement rhymes: 2

8.3.2. Division of Scenes

Scene 1: setting the scene (line 1-4)

Scene 2: warning the son (line 5-8)

Scene 3: hunting the Jabberwock (line 9-20)

Scene 4: conversation with son (line 21-24)

Scene 5: pan out/repeat setting the scene (line 25-28)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Final word</th>
<th>Handshape</th>
<th>Movement path</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>circle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Handshape rhymes: 5

Total Movement rhymes: 1

8.4.2. Division of Scenes

Scene 1: setting the scene (line 1-4)

Scene 2: talking to son (line 5-8)

Scene 3: hunting Jabberwock and talking to son (line 9-24)

Scene 4: setting the scene again (line 25-28)

9. Works Cited


