Two- Rather Than Three-Dimensional Representation of Saccades in Monkey Superior Colliculus

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Saccades are controlled by neurons in the brainstem reticular formation that receive input from the superior colliculus and cortex. Recently two quantitative models have been proposed for the role of the colliculus in the generation of three-dimensional eye movements. In order to test these models, three-dimensional eye movements were measured in the alert monkey to investigate whether the saccadic motor map of the superior colliculus is two-dimensional, representing retinal target vectors, or three-dimensional, representing three-dimensional motor error for the rotation of the eye. Electrical stimulation of the superior colliculus produced two-dimensional, not three-dimensional, eye movements. It is therefore concluded that the collicular motor map is two-dimensional.

THE MONKEY SUPERIOR COLLICULUS (SC) is a brainstem structure that is important in the generation of saccadic eye movements (1). Electrical stimulation of the SC produces saccades with short latencies at low stimulation thresholds. Saccade amplitude and direction depend predominantly on the site of stimulation (2, 3). Cells in the deeper layers of the SC burst vigorously for saccades that are directed into their movement field (the range of saccade vectors for which a particular SC cell is activated), and the neural activity related to movement is tightly coupled to saccade onset (1, 4). Furthermore, the SC provides an important input to the reticular formation, where the burst generator for all rapid eye movements is situated (5, 6). Whereas ablation of the SC (7, 8) causes only minor permanent deficits in saccadic performance, small local injections of either muscimol or lidocaine (9), which inhibit neural activity, cause profound deficits for saccades directed into the affected movement field. Parallel pathways, presumably incorporating the frontal eye field (FEF), may be able to compensate for most of the deficits after ablation of the SC (7).

So far, researchers have investigated the function of the SC by measuring eye movements in two dimensions (horizontal and vertical). Recently, however, theoretical studies have shown that a complete description of the rotational kinematics of eye movements must be in three dimensions, that is, it must include torsion (10, 11). There are two ways of describing the kinematics of saccades. One description is a trajectory; eye position is described by a virtual rotation from a head-fixed reference position (primary position). Experimental evidence shows that all virtual rotation axes describing eye positions lie in a single plane [Listing's law (12)], which is defined as Listing's plane (Fig. 1) if the head is upright and stationary. The other description uses the rotation of the eye from the starting position of the saccade to the instantaneous position. It has been shown experimentally that in this description saccades have fixed angular velocity axes that are not confined to a plane (13) and therefore require a three-dimensional (3-D) parameter space. These two descriptions are equivalent and are a consequence of the noncommutativity of rotations in 3-D space (10, 11).

We have investigated the neural implementation of Listing's law. Listing's law may be implemented upstream from the motor SC [the quaternion model (11)]. The axis, when the eye moves from initial position $\mathbf{r}_A$ to final position $\mathbf{r}_B$, both in Listing's plane (Fig. 1), is thought to be coded in the motor colliculus as the rotation vector (10, 14, 15):

$$\mathbf{r}_{AB} \approx \mathbf{r}_B - \mathbf{r}_A + \mathbf{r}_A \times \mathbf{r}_B \quad (1)$$

where $\times$ denotes the vector outer product (10, 11). In this model, the collicular vector $\mathbf{r}_{AB}$, the direction of which is the angular velocity axis of an eye rotation, will, in general, be tilted out of Listing's plane because its torsional component, $r_{AB}^x = (\mathbf{r}_A \times \mathbf{r}_B)^x$, is nonzero whenever $\mathbf{r}_A$ and $\mathbf{r}_B$ are nonparallel rotation vectors (13).

A corollary of Eq. 1 is that electrical stimulation will, in general, yield saccades that bring the eye out of Listing's plane (11) in a specific way: the torsional component of the eye, achieved after stimulation, is determined by

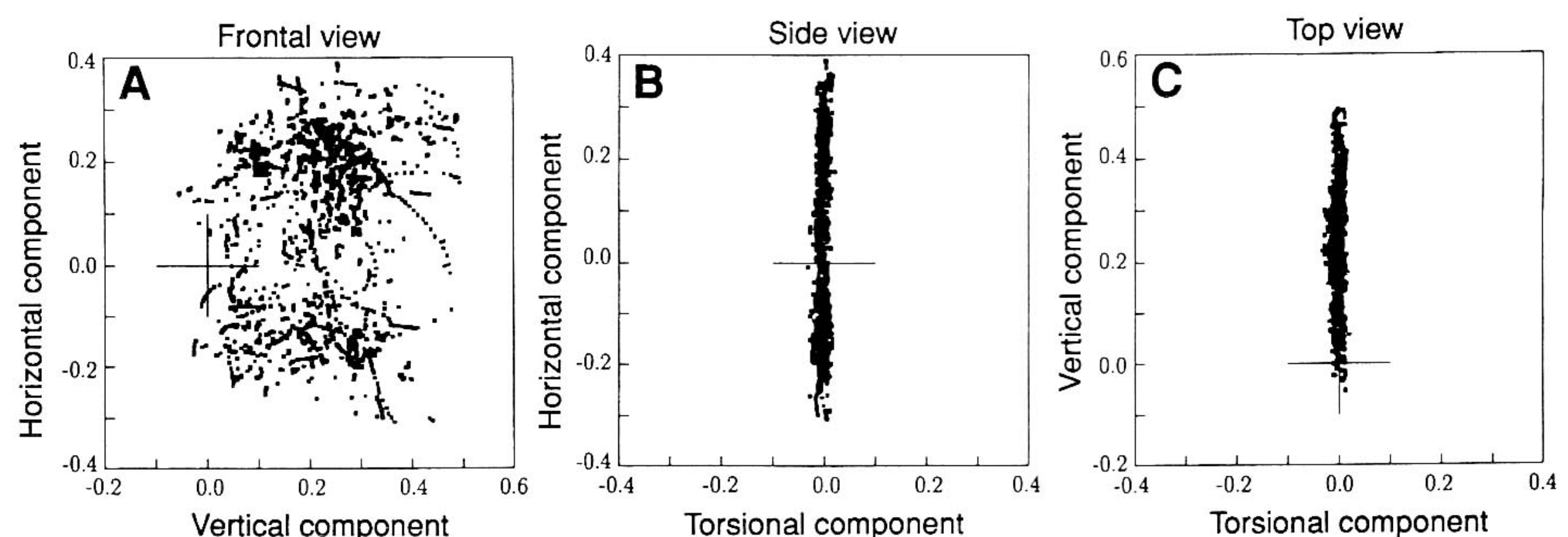$$r_S^x \approx \|\mathbf{r}_{AB}\| \cdot r^\perp \quad (2)$$

Fig. 1. Listing's law for eye position of visually evoked eye movements. Eye positions (15) were sampled at regular intervals during and between saccades in the light (1575 data points) with the head pitched downward by 15°. All eye positions lie in a well-defined plane with zero torsion. Typical standard deviation in the torsional direction was less than 1°. The plane is perpendicular to the torsional direction, thus defining the direction of primary position (cross mark). Data from monkey Ca. (**A**) Frontal (horizontal-vertical) view of Listing's plane. The center of the oculomotor range is, for this monkey, downward from primary position. (**B**) Side view of Listing's plane along the interaural line. (**C**) Top view of Listing's plane along the vertical axis. Units for both figures are the following: a rotation vector component of 0.1 corresponds approximately to $\rho = 10°$ according to the formula $\mathbf{r} = \tan(\rho/2) \cdot \mathbf{n}$ (14, 15).

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where r_{AB} is given by Eq. 1 and $r^\perp$ is the component of the onset position vector, r_{on}, that is orthogonal to the rotation axis r_{AB} (16).

A second consequence of this model is that collicular movement fields are 3-D even for visually evoked saccades. One should therefore find that the majority of cells have their movement field center outside Listing's plane. Such cells will fire optimally for saccades having a rotational axis with a specific torsional component, and their firing rate should thus depend in a systematic way on saccade onset position.

On the other hand, the SC may be conceived as a two-dimensional (2-D) oculocentric motor map (2) that elicits horizontal and vertical components of saccades corresponding to the desired eye displacement (10), d_{AB}, from Listing position r_A to r_B: $d_{AB} = r_B - r_A$ (the vector model). Thus, the torsional component of the angular velocity vector, if needed by the eye-muscle system, is determined downstream of the SC, for example, in an eye position–dependent feedback loop (10). In this model, the centers of collicular movement fields are all in Listing's plane (17), and no deviation of Listing's law is expected after saccades elicited by electrical stimulation: $r_S = d_{AB} + r_{on}$.

We have tested the predictions of these two models by measuring eye position in three dimensions in three alert rhesus monkeys with an implanted dual scleral search coil (18, 19). We electrically stimulated the deeper layers of the SC (110 sites in six colliculi; current strengths between 10 and 100 μA) at locations where neural activity related to movement had been recorded earlier, while letting the monkey look around; we thereby obtained a large range of initial eye positions in Listing's plane.

Microstimulation at a typical site of the right SC of monkey Ca yielded saccade trajectories in the horizontal-vertical and horizontal-torsional plane (Fig. 2, A and B). We examined the amount of eye torsion after electrically evoked saccades as a function of $r^\perp$ (Eq. 2) (Fig. 2C). A least squares regression fit for the data points (slope, -0.0037 ± 0.001) is much closer to the prediction (slope, 0.0) of the vector model than that of the quaternion model. The results for all stimulation sites are presented in Fig. 2D. If the quaternion model applied to our data, the values would be scattered around the line with slope 1.0 (line Q). Instead, the data are much closer to the horizontal axis, although a weak relation emerges, especially for large-amplitude sites. The results obtained for monkeys Br and Ce are similar to those for monkey Ca. The slight slopes that we found might partly be due to nonlinearities of the eyeball–eye muscle system when the eye reaches the limits of its motor range.

We conclude that Listing's law is implemented downstream of the SC on the basis of experimental data with electrical microstimula-tion. Our interpretation is further supported by the results of single unit analysis in the SC (17). Because a parallel pathway that bypasses the SC is known to exist, by which the FEF can send its signals directly to the reticular formation (7), Listing's law may be implemented upstream from the SC. As Listing's law is preserved after collicular stimulation (Fig. 2), this possibility would require the bypass pathway to provide on-line torsional error. Since local inactivation of the SC reduces the dynamics of saccades into the affected movement field (9), which suggests that this parallel pathway may in fact be normally ineffective, the possibility of such fast and accurate on-line error feedback of eye torsion is unlikely. Also, a bilateral chemical inactivation of neuron populations in the SC, which was large enough to drastically reduce the frequency and amplitude of visually elicited saccades, did not lead to a deterioration of Listing's plane for the remaining spontaneous eye movements and did not abolish rapid phases of the vestibulo-ocular reflex in three dimensions (20).

These results are different from those obtained from neurons in the rostral interstitial nucleus of the medial longitudinal fasciculus (riMLF) in the midbrain, the structure that directly controls the motoneurons that generate vertical and torsional rapid eye movement components. A bilateral riMLF lesion leads to the permanent loss of all rapid eye movements with a vertical or torsional component; this result functionally localizes the riMLF between the SC and the extraocular motoneurons (6). Analysis of unit activity in the riMLF reveals that many neurons code torsional movement components: unilateral inactivation leads to torsional deficits (6), and electrical stimulation always induces eye movements with a torsional component (21).

We postulate that Listing's law for visually evoked saccades is implemented downstream of the SC. Like the visual map in the superficial layers, the motor map in the deeper layers of the SC is organized in oculocentric coordinates. This 2-D organization greatly simplifies multisensory coordination, such as the generation of saccades to auditory targets (22) or the coordination of eye and head (23) or eye and arm (24).

Fig. 2. Results of electrical stimulation in deeper layers of right SC. Data from monkey Ca. (A) Saccade trajectories in the yz plane as a result of electrical microstimulation at site ca1542 (50-μA cathodal pulses; train duration, 70 ms; pulse width, 0.25 ms; 330 Hz). Starting positions of the eye were scattered widely within the oculomotor range. Saccades were directed leftward and downward. Mean amplitude equals 29.3°. (B) Same data as in (A) in side view. Saccades remain in Listing's plane. (C) Quantitative test of the prediction of the quaternion model (Eq. 2) and the vector model for collicular coding of saccades. Data from (A) and (B). The continuous line (Q) represents the prediction of the quaternion model (slope $\|r_{AB}\| = 0.261$), whereas the dotted line is the fitted regression line through the data points ($r_S^x = -0.0113-0.0037 \cdot r^\perp$; SD of fitted slope: $\sigma_s = 0.001$; $n = 47$). Note the differences in scale for ordinate and abscissa. (D) Result of analysis, as in (C), for all stimulation sites in monkey Ca. [□, data from (C)]. Predicted slope based on the quaternion model (given by $\|r_{AB}\|$). Measured slopes (α) from data based on regression line analysis. Linear regression yields $\alpha = -0.0001 + 0.102 \cdot \|r_{AB}\|$ ($\sigma_s = 0.006$; $n = 63$), which is close to $\alpha = 0.0$. Similar results were obtained for monkey Br: $\alpha = 0.0214 + 0.161 \cdot \|r_{AB}\|$ ($\sigma_s = 0.02$; $n = 31$), and monkey Ce: $\alpha = -0.0121 + 0.227 \cdot \|r_{AB}\|$ ($\sigma_s = 0.007$; $n = 46$).
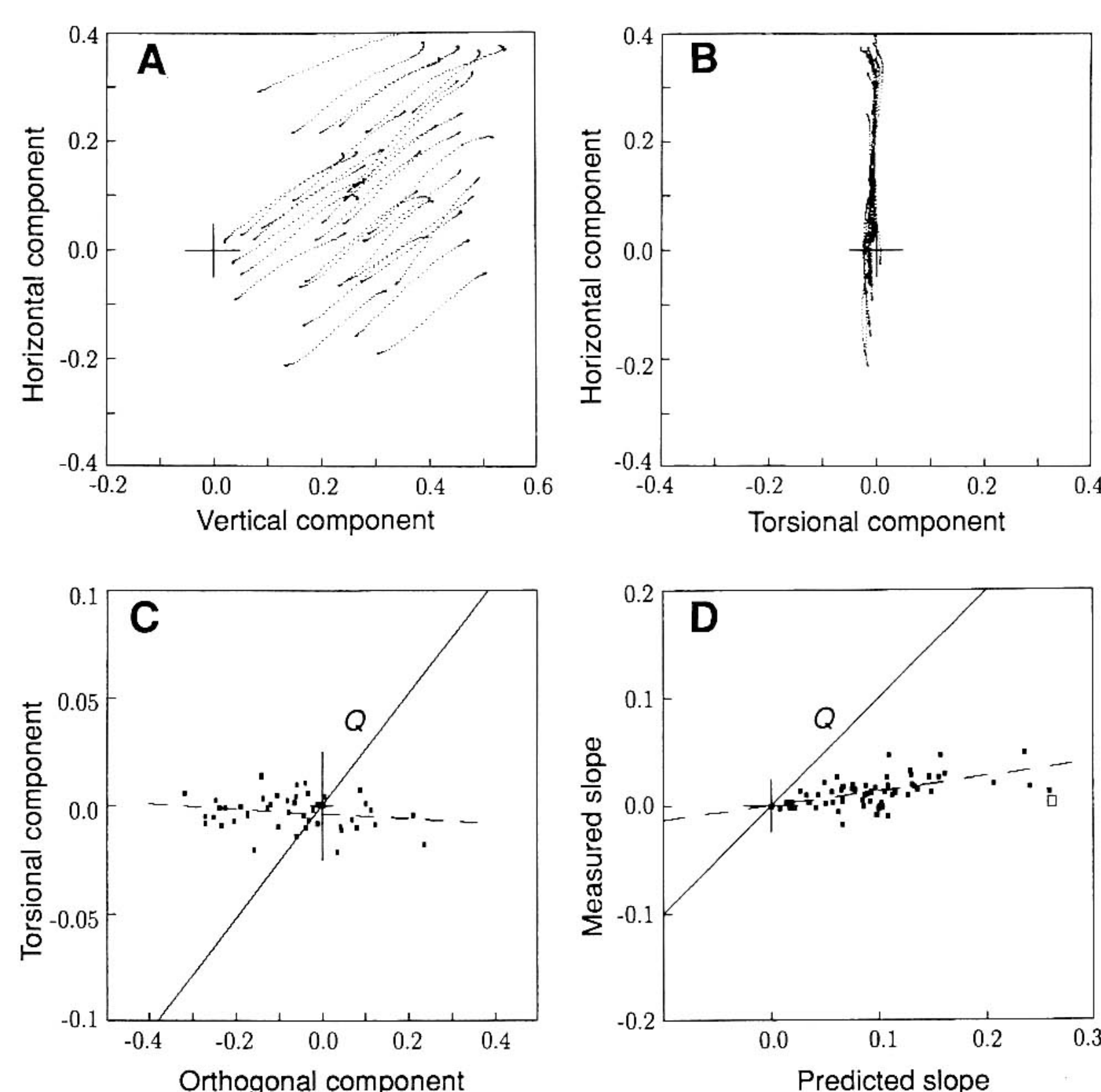
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15. Three-dimensional eye positions are expressed as rotation vectors (*10, 14*): $\mathbf{r} = \tan(\rho/2) \cdot \mathbf{n}$, where $\mathbf{n}$ is the normalized axis about which the eye has to rotate to go from primary position to the current eye position and ρ is the amount of rotation about $\mathbf{n}$. This notation is fully equivalent to the quaternion representation (*11, 13*). We have adopted a right-handed coordinate system: torsion is the component of $\mathbf{r}$ along the forward-pointing x axis (right ear down rotation, positive), vertical position along the leftward-pointing y axis (downward, positive), and horizontal position along the upward-pointing z axis (leftward, positive). As an example, a position 20° to the left of primary position $[(x,y,z) = (0,0,0)]$ is represented by the coordinates $(x,y,z) = (0,0,0.176)$. All mathematical expressions in Eqs. 1 and 2 are evaluated up to third-order corrections in the angle ρ, an error that is beyond experimental resolution.
16. Equation 2 follows from Eq. 1 if one substitutes $\mathbf{r}_B$ by $\mathbf{r}_{AB}$ (the stimulation-induced rotation) and $\mathbf{r}_A$ by $\mathbf{r}_{on}$ (the initial eye position) and calculates the torsional component. We use the fact that both $\mathbf{r}_{on}$ (Fig. 1) and $\mathbf{r}_{AB}$ (not shown) lie in Listing's plane.
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