

Language and Gesture Use in Interpersonal Communication

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When studying how communication occurs in interpersonal communication, researchers have often focused exclusively on speech. However, when people speak, they also gesture (or move their bodies in meaningful ways, including hand, arm, shoulder, and head movements). The present studies bring together work on speech in naturalistic contexts, including conversations between health care providers and patients, conversations between international students meeting for the first time, and interviews. These studies show that the meaning expressed by speakers does not come from speech alone. Speakers use gestures for a variety of functions, including to express the unexpressible (e.g., pain), to engage interlocutors in interactions, and to communicate a stance on a topic. Gesture performs complex communication tasks, from establishing or repairing mutual understanding to foreshadowing information that would be contributed later, and contrasting past and present emotions or attitudes. Speech and gesture can be used to convey different and complementary parts of the message. These findings have implications for applied issues. For example, does an interpreter translate only the speech or also the meaning conveyed by gestures? And should foreign language teaching include the instruction of gesture use and interpretation?

Gesture use in health care interactions: A semiotic resource for participants, an elucidating setting for researchers

Jennifer Gerwing, Akershus University Hospital

When patients and health care providers speak to each other, they integrate visible bodily action with their speech. I review research on gesture use, using examples from actual clinical dialogues, and drawing out both practice-relevant implications. Patients speaking about pain tend to gesture, indicating relevant body regions, demonstrating movements or positions, or enacting metaphorical aspects of their pain experience. Semantic feature analysis has shown that gesture conveys information about the location and size of painful sensations and speech conveys its intensity, effects, duration, cause, and awareness. In interpreted interactions, physicians and patients used gestures to provide information not conveyed in speech, yet interpreters repeated those gestures less than half the time, with implications for the quality of translation.

Gesture use in conversations of international students

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Previous studies used cartoon retell tasks to elicit gestures. This study tested whether speakers use gestures in a cartoon retell in the same way as in a conversational setting. International students talked informally in a group. They also watched a cartoon and told back the story.

Both interactive and topic gestures were coded. Interactive gestures engage the interlocutor; topic gestures refer to the conversation topic. Our analyses thus far have been on the frequency of gestures (i.e., percentage of words accompanied by gestures). On average, speakers used more gestures overall (16%) in conversations than in retelling a cartoon (8%), for both interactive and topic gestures. Speakers' gesture use in a cartoon retell may not generalize to other discourse contexts.

Stance in body and in words

Jennifer Hinnell and **Sally Rice**, University of Alberta

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