

Gesturing to indicate time in L2 speakers of English

Lopez-Ozieblo Renia
Hong Kong Polytechnic University
renia.lopez@polyu.edu.hk

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This talk will present results from a comparative pilot study analysing gestures in the narrations of ten speakers of English as a second language (C1 level and above) from five different mother tongues (Farsi, Cantonese, Romanian, Italian and Spanish). In particular, we focus on recurrent gestures used with temporal discourse markers such as 'after', 'before', 'and then', 'again', etc. We investigated the information provided by the gesture and its form to identify if a 'stable form-meaning unit recurs in different contexts of use over different speakers in a particular speech community' (Ladewig, 2014, pp. 1559-1560).

Our study explores how the speech and the gesture together first position the action at a specific point in space and then indicate a transition in time (reflected in the changes of the gestures in space). In particular, with the marker 'and then' we found that most of our participants seldom indicated a thematic discontinuity (Bestgen (1998) had proposed that 'and' signals continuity while 'then' signals 'discontinuity'). However, in those individuals who did gesture we often observed a cyclical gesture "bridging" the transition between two events, as also noted by Cooperrider and Núñez (2009).

This bridging gesture might be part of the cyclical family of recurrent gestures (Ladewig, 2011) where the TIME-IS-MOTION-THROUGH-SPACE metaphor is represented through these gestures that link the present with the past (as also suggested by Calbris, 2011). Understanding how TIME is mapped onto SPACE (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) through the study of gesture has led to an increased understanding of how we conceptualize time (Borodotsky, 2018; Casasanto & Jasmin, 2012; Núñez & Cooperrider, 2013; Pagán Cánovas & Valenzuela, 2017; Walker & Cooperrider, 2016). Many of these studies have shown that in English speakers time is conceptualized in the sagittal (back to front) and lateral (left to right) axis, with a significant preference for the lateral axis in spontaneous speech (Casasanto & Jasmin, 2012). Our study found a range of bridging cyclical gestures, performed in a combination of axes (including the vertical axis), confirming the ability of speakers to mix temporal metaphors in gestures, even if this is less frequent in speech (Walker & Cooperrider, 2016).

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