

Acquisition Sketch Project

Meeting 18: Gesture

13/14 May 2025

Gesture

- Language is not unimodal.
- Important in all communication, but especially with young children.
- Quasi-universal and culturally-specific communicative gestures
- Very time-consuming to analyze

Gesture – Four types

- Deictic/point
- Conventional/emblematic
- Representational/iconic
- Beat



Gesture theory highlights

- CL acquisition of speech/sign very closely linked with gesture. Gesture typically appears first and reliance on gesture decreases as children develop more lexicon & syntax
- Deictic first to emerge <1 year
expressing functions e.g. giving, showing, requesting, attention-directing

Child Gesture	Referents
<i>point</i>	drink, food, bubbles, plane, book, child, ear, back, insect, sandbox, hose, caregiver, box.
<i>gimme</i>	food, bottle, diaper, glove, shoe, book, hand-lotion, ball, photo, camera.
<i>attention focus</i>	diaper, ball, dirt, food, book, orange, face cloth, cup, sock, shoe, telephone, bubble ring.

(Kelly 2002, 2011, 2014)

Gesture theory highlights – declarative pointing

- CL declarative pointing – pointing to direct attention ~ 12 months old
Special significance for cognitive development (e.g. Tomasello et al. 2007)
- CDL high functional load of pointing & gaze in establishing & negotiating joint attention (e.g. Baldwin 1995; Goldin-Meadow 2007; Rowe 2000)
- Believed to be Universal in CL and CDL. But form can vary
- Sketch isn't going to capture emergence, but note presence/absence and also form

Gesture theory highlights – declarative pointing

- Some languages more gesture rich than others (Marentette et al. 2016)
- More easily seen in Conventional gestures
- In some cases, presence of (alternate) sign language e.g. Central Australia, describing conventional gestures necessary in these cases
e.g. Pitjantjatjara sketch

Box 7/12. Gestures in CL and CDL

Core

- (i) What types of deictic gestures do children/caregivers use?
- (ii) What conventionalized gestures do children/caregivers use (including any alternate sign systems)?

Extension

- (iii) Do children/caregivers use representational gestures, and if so, how?
- (iv) For each type of gesture, how do they support communicative development in combination with speech/sign?
- (v) For each type of gesture, how does their use change across development/age of child-addressee?

Gesture Analysis

- Incredibly time consuming!
- So we generally don't encourage you to code and analyse all the gestures in the sketch data

Gesture Analysis – But when do you code?

Code IF

- You don't notice any deictic gestures (by kids, adults, or both)
- There is an alternate sign language (could do conventional only)
- If you are particularly interested and have the resources
- May also want to if not many gestures

Gesture Analysis – How if you are coding

Start with ONE gesture tier

Note Type and Function for each gesture e.g. POINT(index):imperative
or POINT(lip):declarative or EMBLEM:thumbs up – agree

You can then work from this data to create a taxonomy of the gestures
in the sketch data.

Gesture Analysis – How if you are NOT coding

Tag a few examples of gestures as you notice them

You can use Type:Function format and have a separate tier if you want.

Attempt to answer the questions from these notes/your impressions

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Gesture Sketches: Inuktitut ([Lee & Allen, 2023](#))

Inuktitut sketch complete – but gesture not very frequent

Table 29. Number of gestures in CDS.

	1;4	1;10	2;4	2;10	3;4	
Deictic	14	4		2	3	
Conventionalized	1		1			
Total	15	5	1	2	3	7-4% adult utterances

Deictics used to direct child's attention (typically with index finger)

Gestures less frequent with children over 1;4

Gesture Sketches: Inuktitut ([Lee & Allen, 2023](#))

Table 52. Number of gestures in child children's speech.

	1;4	1;10	2;4	2;10	3;4	
Deictic	8	19	7	4	4	
Conventionalized	8	1	1			
Total	16	20	8	4	4	22-1% child utterances

At every age children use deictic gestures to influence attention

Decreases from 2;4

Variety of hand shapes used (whole hand and index point, as well as holding up objects)

Gesture Sketches: Murrinhpatha

Murrinhpatha sketch in progress

Analysis is impressionistic with tagged examples drawn upon

- Deictic gesture (pointing)
- Conventionalized gesture for 'come here'

Pointing – Children

- Child (2;6) points to her older sister, **locating** her for her mother
- Points by raising her arm, extending forearm & an index finger, with other fingers only slightly retracted



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Child (4;8)



Pointing – Adults

- Adults (to each other and to the children present) point to **locate** nearby places and the events in a story they are telling
- Same form as child's point, extended forearm and index finger with other fingers only slightly retracted
- Also lip point, head tilt



‘Come here’ gesture – child

- Child (3;0) to older brother (5;7).
- Full arm rotation from behind shoulder, palm up (supine), ending palm down (prone) at chest



‘Come here’ gesture in CDL

- Adult to niece (2;3)
- Hand extended towards child’s chest, palm down. Retracts some of her fingers quickly towards palm, then extends them again towards the child.

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'Come here' gesture in CDL

- To child (3;8) (classificatory son)
- Open palm, repeated hand movement to the side, close to body
- Fingers do not retract or extend



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Representational – ‘drink’

Child (4;0) to cousin (4;2)



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Questions and Discussion

Next session

June 11

Community reports