Is There a Place for Instructed Gesture in EFL?

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In this paper is addressed developments in the use of gesture of five participants in a Japanese university public speaking class in which gesture was explicitly instructed. Two videotaped presentations, one from the beginning of the semester and one from the end, were analyzed for gesture use. Thereafter, 15-20 minute interviews were conducted with each participant. It was found that participants varied in use and quality of gesture. Interview feedback suggested that gesture use had certain beneficial effects, such as enhancing recall of speech and allowing learners to embody meaning, thus deepening their understanding of their own speech. Based on this study and other research, methods for instructing gesture and avenues for future research are offered.

この論文は、日本の大学のスピーチ・クラスを受講した学生五名のジェスチャーの使い方に関する発達過程を観察している。この研究では、学期の始めに行ったスピーチと学期終了時期に行ったスピーチを録画し、スピーチ中のジェスチャーを分析した。また学期終了後、各学生につき15-20分の面談を行った。分析と面談の結果、ジェスチャーの使い方と質は学生によって異なることが分かった。また面談によって、ジェスチャーは、学生がスピーチの内容を思い出し、スピーチの意味を具現化させることを助長し、その結果、自分のスピーチに対する理解を深める有益な効果をもたらすことが明らかになった。　この研究及びその他の調査結果をもとに、当論文では、ジェスチャーについて教示する方法を提案し、また将来のリサーチの可能性についても示唆している。

Gesture's relationship with second language development is a relatively new frontier in SLA research (Gullberg, 2010; McCafferty & Stam, 2008), but one that could make significant contributions to how SLA is understood (Gullberg, 2010). Within gesture research, one question that has not been explored much is whether it is worthwhile to teach gestures to foreign and second language learners. Ostensibly, such a suggestion might seem far-fetched. Stam and McCafferty (2008) wrote, "Whether spontaneous L2 gestures are teachable or even should be taught is largely an unresolved issue" (p. 18). Tabensky (2008) went further, stating that "Trying to coach students on which [gestures] to perform is simply unthinkable" (p. 318). The only SLA research involving gesture instruction (Jungheim, 1991) is more about gesture recognition than production. However, perhaps in certain contexts, instructed gesture may have an important place in foreign language pedagogy and research. This paper addresses such a context.

The context for this small exploratory study was a public speaking class at a Japanese university, in which students whose L1 was Japanese were given instruction on how to use

gesture to improve their spoken L2 (English) in short oral presentations. Regarding gesture, two things are notable about this context. First, the learners' L1 was Japanese. When considering the instruction of gesture in EFL, it is likely that the L1 is a significant factor. Although there is certainly individual variation among learners, gesture has been found to be systematically different among different languaculture groups (Gullberg, 2010). The use of both conventionalized and unconventionalized gesture in Japanese and English as L1 seems to vary and is not necessarily acquired along with speech when learning an L2 (Jungheim, 2004, 2006). The second notable characteristic of this study's context is that learners were producing rehearsed expository speech, as the public speaking class demanded rehearsed, rather than spontaneous, oral presentations. Spontaneous speech is typically accompanied by more gesture than rehearsed speech (see Tabensky, 2008, p. 301). Thus, encouraging EFL learners to increase gesture in rehearsed speech makes some intuitive sense. With these two contextual points in mind, this paper details the effects of guided instruction in the use of gesture for five L1 Japanese EFL learners presenting rehearsed oral presentations. The paper also includes relevant insights from research related to gesture and SLA to offer suggestions about how and when gesture instruction could be implemented in EFL classrooms.

Participants

The participants in this study were five 2nd-year university English majors, L1 Japanese, at a small private women's college in Western Japan. The participants were members of a larger group of 41 students enrolled in two different public speaking classes taught by the researcher at the university. All participants had their presentations videotaped as part of the normal curriculum. The five participants for this study were chosen because they all were in good standing in the class and had shown effort in their presentations. Due to the exploratory nature of the study, the main criterion for selection was selecting students who would be comfortable talking about their presentations and use of gestures. Participation in the study was voluntary and solicited after grades had been submitted for the term.

Methodology

During the 15-week public speaking class, participants completed three different oral presentations. Two were analyzed for this study. The first was a 1-minute, individual presentation about a good experience. The other, the third presentation done, was an individual presentation about a favorite place and included participant-made PowerPoint slides projected onto a large screen. All presentations were given without the aid of notes. They were rehearsed presentations and, to some extent, memorized.

For the first presentation, participants had no instruction in the use of gesture. Participants were only instructed to keep their hands in front and above their waists, one on top of another, in what was referred to as a professional presenter's position, and the "home" position for their hands. They were told to use gesture as they wanted, but to maintain the home position when not gesturing. The second presentation (not a part of this study) was a group presentation. Students worked in groups of two or three and presented the results of a survey that they had created and conducted with peers. For the presentation, PowerPoint was used, and each group member presented for about 1 minute on one section of the presentation. Gesture was instructed in this presentation for the first 10-15 seconds for each individual's presentation. For the third presentation, participants were taught how to use gesture during the first 20 seconds of their presentations. In other words, advice and instruction on the use of gestures was only done for the opening section of each participant's presentation. The reason for this was that there were

around 20 students in each class, and classes were 90-minutes long. Thus, it was impossible to do gesture instruction for more than this time. It was also deemed unnecessary because the intent in gesture instruction was not to choreograph the complete presentation, but rather to show students in what ways gesture is often used in English and how gesture could enhance their speaking. For this purpose, the 10-20 second windows of instruction seemed sufficient.

In this paper "the first presentation" and "the third presentation will be referred to, to emphasize that there was a second presentation that was excluded from the study. The second presentation was a group presentation. In the researcher's opinion, group members influence each other's presentation style and choices, and groups themselves present in different styles (e.g., some presented one after another, others presented taking turns back and forth). Focusing only on individual presentations offered the opportunity to observe and analyze participants' presentations in relatively similar contexts.

Three types of gestures were taught. First, the researcher showed students how to use presentational gestures to stress words, generally using one or both hands in a downward motion to hit the beat of the stressed syllable in the phrase they were speaking. For example, in the phrase *the best way*, the speaker might add beat gestures on either *best*, *way*, or on both words. Another type of instruction was representational gestures used to represent the meaning of a word or phrase. For example, a *long time ago* might be represented by one arm with an open hand motioning backwards or to the side, away from the speaker. Such a gesture could represent distance or the idea of back (in time). Finally, deictic gestures were taught. These deictic gestures were mostly about directing audience attention to the PowerPoint (presentation three). An example is "Take a look at this graph," with an outstretched arm and hand toward the PowerPoint screen. This three-type gesture scheme is adapted from Tabensky (2008), which was also a study, in part, of expository L2 speech. Tabensky's study only quantified presentational and representational gestures, but the current study also included deictic gestures. Using PowerPoint seemed to increase the occurrence of deictic gestures and it seemed worthwhile to distinguish them from other representational gestures. It was recognized that more complex and often-used gesture coding schemes exist, including those of Ekman and Freisen (1969), Kendon (2004), and McNeill (2005), but because of the exploratory nature of this study and the fact that it resembled Tabensky's (2008) context in many ways, the simple, albeit imperfect, gesture coding scheme was chosen.

The method for gesture instruction was as follows. First, participants would present the opening 10-20 seconds of their presentation. Then, the presenters would begin again, with the researcher stopping them during certain utterances where gesture was not used but should have been in order to emphasize or represent the ideas for the audience. Generally speaking, most participants did not employ many gestures, so the instruction usually involved four to five words or phrases in the opening 10-20 seconds of the presentation that could benefit from gesture. For example, many students began presentations by saying their topic. A student might say, "I would like to discuss why China and Japan have different opinions about the Senkaku Islands." If such a phrase were said without any gesture at all (as it often was), the researcher might suggest using gesture on *why* for emphasis, or on *China and Japan,* because these words and phrases are especially meaningful for the speaker's purposes.

The main objective of gesture instruction was to have learners improve their speech. It was thought that gesture could positively influence pronunciation, students' feelings towards English, and their ability to communicate their messages. All of these ideas, though not proven, seem to have support in SLA gesture research, such as how gesture relates to prosody (McCafferty, 2006),

the embodiment of language (Platt & Brooks, 2008), and listeners' ability to interpret messages when spoken to by speakers who use gestures (Harris, 2003). Finally, it is worth noting that gesture instruction was individual, but conducted with the full class present. In this way, all participants were encouraged to practice the gestures, even when they were not the individual speaking at the front. The instruction served overall as a consciousness raising activity about using gesture with speech.

Use of the exact gestures instructed by the researcher was not required. However, students were required to use gesture at least three times total in their second presentation, and five times total in their third presentation. It was not required that the five gestures be of any particular type, and the gesture types discussed in this paper were not instructed as such. Rather, the focus of gesture instruction was on making meaningful speech. In fact, though it was not empirically verified, the researcher noticed that some students used the exact gestures they were taught, but others used gestures that were their own style. Understanding why students differed in how much they wanted to exactly mimic what they were taught could be a further area of study. This study, however, was simply focused on quantifying the use and self-perception of use over the course of the term.

The data for this study were gathered as follows. First, the use of gesture in the two presentations was viewed and coded into the three general typologies: presentational, representational, and deictic. After the videos had been viewed and coded, 15-20 minute interviews were conducted with participants. Interviews were conducted in both Japanese and English, in accordance with the participants' comfort level and ability to express themselves clearly. Three of the five interviews involved some use of Japanese. Interview notes were made, but interviews were not recorded, as it was deemed unnecessary and an additional imposition on the participants. The participants' were asked four questions, with follow-up questions as necessary.

1. Do you feel gestures help you speak better when presenting?
2. Do you feel gestures improve your English pronunciation?
3. Do you feel gestures help you understand your own English speech better?
4. Do you feel learning gestures changes how you speak outside of class?

Results and Discussion

Quantitative Use of Gestures

Table 1 shows the number of gestures of each type produced by the five participants. The table includes three sections: the first presentation, the first 20 seconds of the third presentation (which included instructed gestures), and the rest of the third presentation. The exact times of the first presentation and of the third presentation (after the first 20 seconds) are indicated.

Table 1. Use of Gesture by Five Participants During Two Different Oral Presentations

Participant	Presentation number										
	1				3a			3b			
	PG	RG	DG	Time	PG	RG	DG	PG	RG	DG	Time
A	13	0	0	1:18	7	1	1	11	4	2	2:02
B	9	0	0	1:15	13	0	0	0	0	0	1:20
C	11	0	0	1:27	5	0	1	8	1	6	1:05
D	13	0	0	1:25	6	1	1	15	0	2	1:31
E	21	1	4	1:20	6	0	2	10	1	5	1:35

Note. PG = presentational gesture; RG = representational gesture; DG = deictic gesture; 3a is the first 20 seconds (with instructed gesture); 3b is the rest of the presentation (without instructed gesture).

The data presented in Table 1 reflect relative consistency in gesture use by each participant across both presentations, but significant variation between participants. There is some evidence that instructed gesture may have had an influence on participants. For example, there are clearly more representative gestures in the third presentation, and often in the first 20 seconds of that presentation, when gestures were instructed. There also are more deictic gestures in the third presentation. This is due, in part, to the use of PowerPoint in the third presentation, as many of the deictic gestures were toward the PowerPoint screen. Nevertheless, the use of such deictic gestures was instructed starting with the second presentation when students first used PowerPoint. Thus, it is likely that the deictic gesture instruction had some influence on their use in the third presentation, even in the uninstructed section after the first 20 seconds. Unfortunately, this study's sample size is too small to benefit from statistical analyses of probabilities or patterns to determine the significance of differences. Even if such analyses were possible, though, solely a quantitative view of gesture would be insufficient; the quality of gesture is very important, as has been noted by others (see Gullberg, 2010, p. 87).

With regard to quality, deictic gestures were mostly arm and hand extensions toward the PowerPoint screen. However, representational gestures varied. For example, participant D used a representational gesture for the phrase *all year round*. Both hands began roughly in front of the participant's face and then circled out and downward, ending around hip level. This gesture was very much an imitation of how an English native speaker might gesture the same phrase, and indeed, this was a gesture that had been instructed during the 20 second beginning of the participant's presentation. It could be regarded as a successful use of gesture in that it appeared natural and probably helped participant D communicate her idea. Participant A also used numerous representational gestures. One of these was *a lot of*, during the first 20 seconds. The participant extended her right arm and hand away from her body, hand open, palm up and struck a beat with this pose on the *lot* syllable of the phrase, which is always the stressed part of that phrase. Again, this gesture represented what a native English speaker might do and had been instructed. However, participant A went on to use other gestures that did not seem natural from the researcher's perspective. For example, she used a similar gesture to that used for *a lot of*, except she used both arms and hands (in other words, both arms out, hands open, palms up) to express *so* [sic] *hard workers*, striking a beat on *hard*. Here it seemed the gesture did not represent *hard*, at least as a native English speaker might use it, but some observers might see the gesture and not feel dissonance between the participant's speech and meaning. Later, the same student represented the words *anyone* and *anytime* with a gesture that is commonly used to represent options or choices, such as an either/or statement: she first put one hand out to her right side with the palm up for *anyone* and then brought the left hand out in the same pattern on the left for *anytime*. In this case, it seems likely that many observers would find this gesture confusing and dissonant even if they clearly understood the participant's speech. In cases where learners produced gestures too often, or in ways that looked unnatural to listeners, was this caused by the researcher's gesture instruction? Did the instruction of gesture cause more harm than good? These concerns will be revisited.

Self-Perception of Gesture Use

The interviews elicited the participants' own perceptions of how gestures impacted their speech. The most interesting finding of the interviews was that, in response to the first question concerning whether or not gestures improve their speech, all students mentioned the fact that gestures helped them recall what they wanted to say. This was not one of the perceived benefits considered by the researcher when choosing to instruct gestures,

but it was the only unanimous comment of the five participants. Participant C gave the example of the word *powerful*, which was said with the elbow bent, forearm vertical, and a closed fist with the knuckles facing outward. A gesture sometimes referred to as an *arm pump* in sports. For this participant, the image was a memorable point when rehearsing her presentation, and thus it served to help her remember her speech when giving the presentation in front of the class. Participant E noted the word *but* with which she used a flat hand facing the audience with a slightly extended arm, a gesture she related to the word *stop*. As with participant C, she said that during rehearsal, this gesture became a memorable point that she knew she had to reach in her formal presentation in front of the class.

In answer to the second question, only participant B felt that using gesture improved her pronunciation. She specifically referred to it helping her stress important words. In the researcher's mind, the main purpose of gesture was to improve pronunciation, specifically prosodic elements such as stress and intonation. Nevertheless, the other four participants did not feel that it changed how they pronounced English. Further research about this is warranted. Perhaps two recordings of a speaker presenting, one using gesture, one without, could provide data for further analysis of this question.

Concerning the third question, three of five participants gave examples of how using gesture helped embody the meaning of their speech. Participant A mentioned using the word *posture*, a word that was new to her when preparing her presentation. Through presenting and modeling the word, she felt she better understood the meaning. Participant D mentioned the gesture for *all year round*. Although it was English she knew before presenting, she commented that the meaning of *round* with the phrase *all year* became more apparent to her with the gesture. Participant C mentioned the word *powerful* again as becoming enhanced by the gesture. She said she felt like she could feel the meaning, even though it was not a new word for her.

The final interview question asked whether gestures changed how participants spoke outside the presentation class. None of the participants said that they thought about gestures when they spoke in other classes. However, two participants mentioned that gestures could be useful if they prepare presentations in other classes.

The interviews and the researcher's own perspective on the quality of the gestures used by the participants adds important information to the quantification of the gestures shown in Table 1. At the same time, even this qualitative perspective on gesture still leaves many important questions unanswered. For example, what constitutes a good gesture? When is there too much gesture, or too little? Does instruction of gesture actually improve speaking, or does it more often lead to dissonance for learners? How critical is the learners' English proficiency or individual identity in terms of how they will react to learning to gesture in L2 rehearsed speech? If EFL teachers choose to instruct gesture, these and other questions eventually will come up. This study is quite limited by its small scope and lack of controls on variables, but a case can be made for the instruction of gesture, and directions for future research on instructed gesture can be suggested.

Conclusion

Is there a place for instructed gesture in EFL? Although the small study presented here lacks power to make strong suggestions, the findings of this and other research, as well as the researcher's own experience, imply that there is a place for instructed gesture in EFL. In the context of rehearsed speech in EFL contexts, raising students' awareness of gesture and having them practice the embodiment of speech through gesture deserves some time in the EFL curriculum. Rehearsed speech contexts could include public speaking and drama performance, both of which are not uncommon in EFL and ESL curricula. This study suggested that gestures can positively influence learners'

recall and their conceptualization of English meaning-making. However, the study did not explore these topics in any depth, so these are two areas that merit further study. In considering these areas, both learner perceptions and more objective measures could yield useful insights. For example, for examining gestures' effect on recall, interviews that elicit learners' perceptions coupled with a quantitative recall test could prove stronger than either research method in isolation. It should be emphasized as well that learner perceptions of their own gesture use or its effect on their speech may differ from how others (e.g., teachers) perceive their use of gesture. This, as well, is an interesting path for inquiry.

In what exact manner and how much time gesture instruction deserves in the classroom are also topics that should be explored more. It is likely that specific pedagogical approaches to instructed gesture will have influential effects on whether or not the instruction benefits learners. Some activities will be preferred over others depending on learners' level and other variables. The researcher's own activities that could be useful for instructing gesture are included in the appendix. Both how often and how much time gesture instruction should be given must be determined by teachers. In the researcher's own practice, rather than teach gesture in only one class, using small portions of consecutive classes was thought to be more useful.

Although quantitatively based studies involving more participants could prove interesting by indicating general patterns of gesture use, the author's own experience suggests that a more in-depth qualitative case study might be most useful. For example, participant E used many gestures in her first presentation but her use of gesture during the final presentation declined relatively. She was also the only participant to use representational and deictic gestures in the first presentation. In fact, this participant was a relatively fluent English speaker who had attended a high school where English was used often. The decline was not explored specifically in this study, but such a case is worth investigating. This participant had significant English exposure and was relatively more fluent and comfortable presenting than her peers. A longitudinal case study approach to a participant's gesture use and development in expository speech could make a strong contribution.

In short, more research than this study is needed in order to understand more clearly any benefit that learners' might be gaining from instructed gesture. Research should include more controls on learner variables, more detailed coding of gestures, and a more longitudinal approach to gesture use and development by speakers. Nevertheless, it is hoped that despite the small scale of this study, it might inspire other researchers to take an interest in this area and share their own findings. Such contributions may lead to a definitive and useful place for instructed gesture in EFL contexts.

Bio Data

Nat Carney is Associate Professor of English at Kobe College in Nishinomiya. He is interested in research on L2 English speaking, listening, and assessment.

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Appendix

Suggested Teaching Activities for Gesture

Activity #1: Planning Gesture in Scripts

If students prepare scripts for a presentation, have them mark words or phrases that merit gesture. Although there is some subjectivity involved, words that convey emotion or key words of the presentation are good candidates for gesture. Make sure students also indicate which syllable of the word or gesture receives the main stress. Then, the teacher can model how parts of the presentation might be spoken with gesture. Alternatively, the teacher can allow students to determine their own gesture without seeing a model. The important point is that students rehearse not only with their voice but also with gesture, so the two can become a synchronized experience.

Activity #2: Observing and Reflecting

TED talks are great models for rehearsed expository speech. They are high quality videos in which the speaker's full body is often visible, they usually have transcripts, and there are many to choose from. Another great point is that not all the TED speakers are native English speakers. The following activity (geared toward L1 Japanese EFL learners) works well for students who already have some awareness of gesture in speech.

Watch three different TED talks and write a reflection about each talk. You can write all reflections on the same page. Each reflection should be 100-150 words in English or 200-300 文字 in Japanese. Hand in one to two typed or handwritten pages on A4-size paper.

Instructions: Write the name of the speaker at the beginning of each reflection. Then comment about the speaker's *speaking style*.

- TED website: http://www.ted.com/
- TED website in Japanese: http://www.ted.com/translate/languages/ja

Remember, focus on *speaking style*, not the content of their presentation, for example,

- use of gesture and body movement,
- eye contact with the audience,
- voice,
- speaking speed,
- pauses.

Activity #3: Observing and Practicing

Watch an excerpt from one TED talk together. Then distribute the transcript to students. Have students identify gestures and the syllables they fall on. Then, have students practice performing the gestures. This gives students another speaker to imitate besides their instructor. Although it is challenging, even low-level students can enjoy trying to move and speak like someone else. A key point, especially with lower level students, is to keep the excerpt short. Between 30 seconds and 1 minute is appropriate.

Activity #4: Reading and Acting Out

Have students read and act out gestures from an appropriate children's book (i.e., one in which the book characters have dialogue and gesture). A suggested series is the Elephant and Piggie books (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elephant_and_Piggie). This activity requires little set-up time and involves embodying language. It might be most appropriate for general awareness of gesture or for students involved in drama production. Children's books can be emotionally complex and yet linguistically accessible, thus this is an activity that could be enjoyed by a range of learners.

Activity #5: Watching and Imitating

Watch a short animation film and imitate some of the characters' gestures as they speak. Animation could be more fun for some students than watching real people and may have easier language than a movie or speaker. In animation having characters gesture is really critical, in order to make them seem real. Many videos are available on YouTube. For example, search for: *Sid The Science Kid | Getting a Shot: You can do it!*