

Can gestures facilitate the acquisition of lexical stress in a second language?

Marieke Hoetjes, Lieke van Maastricht, Ellen van Drie

Radboud University, Centre for Language Studies

Previous studies on language development, production, and comprehension have demonstrated the close relationship between speech and co-speech gesture, but less work is available on the role of gestures in second language (L2) acquisition. Findings on gestural training in L2 prosody acquisition present contrasting results, often varying in the gesture types used in training and not allowing for a comparison of the effect of these different kinds of gestures. Hence, we investigate the potential benefit of two types of gestural training in L2 lexical stress production. Sixty-seven Dutch natives participated in a pretest-posttest experiment, in which they received training on the lexical stress rules of Spanish. Dutch speakers of Spanish often struggle with the Spanish lexical stress rules and many Dutch-Spanish cognates differ only in the position of the stressed syllable (e.g., ‘*piramides*’ and *ventilator* in Dutch, but *pirámides* and *ventilador* in Spanish). Training consisted of written instructions about the three rules for lexical stress assignment in Spanish, each rule being accompanied by one of three types of video examples: 1) a Spanish native producing the example word without gestures, 2) producing a beat gesture during the stressed syllable, or 3) producing a metaphoric gesture during the stressed syllable visualizing the increased duration of this syllable. Before and after training, participants read short Spanish sentences that contained cognates. Auditory and phonetic analyses are currently ongoing and focus on whether type of training affects correct lexical stress assignment in these cognates. Results will be ready to be presented at the LingCologne conference.