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How event perspective influences speech and co-speech gestures about motion[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Speakers of different languages systematically differ in how they package manner and path components of a motion event rendered from a self-motion perspective in both speech and co-speech gesture. Speakers of satellite-framed languages (e.g., German) use a *conflated pattern*, synthesizing manner and path of motion into a single clause or gesture; while speakers of verb-framed languages (e.g., Spanish) use a *separated pattern*, expressing manner and path in separate clauses or gestures. In this study, we ask whether the close coupling between speech and gesture observed for self-motion also becomes evident for events rendered from a caused-motion perspective, which show greater use of conflated strategy in speech across different languages. We observed speech and co-speech gestures of adult native Spanish and German speakers (N = 15/language), as they described an animated clip depicting both self- and caused-motion events. Our findings showed that expression of motion in speech systematically varied by event perspective—with greater use of conflated strategy in caused-motion events than in self-motion events. More important, this variability became evident in co-speech gesture in both languages. Our findings show that speech and gesture form a tightly integrated system, jointly reflecting systematic differences not only between languages, but also within a particular language.

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1. Introduction

Gesture and speech form a tightly integrated system in the expression of motion events (Kita, 2000; McNeill, 1992, 2000). As postulated by the ‘interface hypothesis’ (Kita and Özyürek, 2003), even though gesture and speech form separate systems, they work in tandem from the conceptual planning to the articulation of a motion expression. More specifically, gesture not only helps speakers package spatial information appropriate for its verbalization in a particular language, but it also is largely shaped by the structure of the native speech patterns of the language it accompanies. These bi-directional influences between the two modalities, in turn, result in close similarities between the types of information conveyed in speech and in co-speech gesture. Research to date provides compelling evidence for the interface hypothesis: when describing the movement of a figure from a *self-motion perspective* (e.g., “she runs into the house”), speakers follow language-specific patterns in the way they organize semantic components of the event in both speech and co-speech gesture (Kita and Özyürek, 2003; Özçalışkan, 2016; Özçalışkan, Lucero & Goldin-Meadow, 2016a,b; Özçalışkan & Slobin, 1999). Here we ask whether the tight coupling

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between speech and co-speech gesture remains robust in the expression of events rendered from a *caused-motion perspective*, in which the movement of the figure is triggered by an entity other than the figure itself. We have some preliminary evidence from previous work (Hendriks and Hickmann, 2015; Özçalışkan, 2000, 2005), suggesting that speakers show within-language differences in their expression of events in *speech* when rendering them from a caused-motion perspective compared to a self-motion perspective. However, we do not yet know how systematic this variability is in speech about motion, and whether it also extends to co-speech gestures. If co-speech gesture mirrors the patterns found in speech, then we would expect that differences that we observe in the expression of self- vs. caused-motion events in speech within a language would also become evident in the expression of the same events in co-speech gesture in the same language. We examine this question by studying two structurally different languages (German, Spanish), using a narrative task designed to elicit motion event descriptions from both self- and caused-motion perspectives.

The expression of motion in *speech* shows wide variability across different languages, which, at the same time, is also constrained by a finite set of universal patterns, particularly with respect to manner (i.e., the way in which something moves) and path (i.e., the direction in which something moves) components of motion. As suggested by Talmy (1985, 2000), the world's languages can be grouped into two types based on the way speakers package manner and path components of self-motion in their speech. Speakers of satellite-framed languages (S-language), such as German, show a *conflated pattern*, expressing manner in the verb and path in a particle associated with the verb within a single clause (e.g., “Sie LÄUFT HINEIN” = She RUNS INTO). In contrast, speakers of verb-framed languages (V-language), such as Spanish, show a *separated pattern* in speech, expressing path in the verb and manner outside the verb, in an additional subordinate clause (“Ella ENTRA en casa CORRIENDO” = She ENTERS the house by RUNNING). V-language speakers also typically express only path in their speech about motion and leave out manner information altogether from their descriptions (Özçalışkan & Slobin, 1999; Özçalışkan, 2009, 2016).¹

The expression of self-motion in *co-speech gesture* produced by adult S- and V-language speakers largely follow the language-specific patterns observed in their speech as demonstrated across several different studies (but see McNeill and Duncan, 2000 for an exception).² S-language speakers typically use the same conflated pattern in gesture, synthesizing manner and path components into a single gesture (e.g., wiggle index and middle fingers while moving hand from right to left to convey running right to left). In contrast, V-language speakers follow the same separated pattern that they use in speech, producing one gesture for path (e.g., trace a line from left to right to convey left to right trajectory) and one for manner (e.g., wiggle fingers in the same place to convey running; Gullberg et al., 2008; Kita and Özyürek, 2003; Özçalışkan et al., 2016a). Similar to the patterns observed in speech, V-language speakers frequently express only path of motion in gesture, leaving out manner entirely from their gestures (Özçalışkan, 2016; Özçalışkan et al., 2016a,b, 2017).

The existing evidence on motion events rendered from a *self-motion perspective* suggests strong cross-linguistic differences in its expression both in speech and in co-speech gesture—further highlighting that gesture and speech form a tightly integrated system, with gesture mirroring the cross-linguistic differences observed in speech (see Özçalışkan and Emerson, 2016 for a review). However, less is known about within-language differences in the expression of motion in the two modalities. There is some preliminary evidence suggesting that speakers of both V- and S-languages increase their expression of manner information when describing events from a caused-motion perspective, resulting in more conflated descriptions in speech about motion. For example, previous work examining physical motion of animate entities (e.g., boy enters house vs. boy is pushed into the house; Özçalışkan, 2000) and metaphorical motion of abstract entities (economy enters into recession vs. unemployment pushes economy into recession; Özçalışkan, 2005) in English and Turkish provided some preliminary evidence that speakers of both V- and S-languages increase their expression of manner information when describing events from a caused-motion perspective, resulting in more conflated descriptions in speech about motion—a pattern that has been extended to some other V-languages in more recent work (e.g., French; Hendriks and Hickmann, 2015). Hence these findings suggest within-language differences in the expression of self- vs. caused-motion events in speech. However, given the scarcity of research on caused-motion, we do not yet know how robust a role event perspective plays in speech about motion across different languages. By the same token, we do not know whether a similar pattern of within-language differences holds for the co-speech gestures speakers produce in the two types of languages. This study aims to fill this gap by studying within-language variability in patterns of speech and co-speech gesture use in the self- vs. caused-motion descriptions produced by adult speakers of two structurally different languages, German (V-language) and Spanish (S-language).

1.1. Current study

Languages can be classified as belonging to one of two types—S-framed and V-framed—based on their expression of self-motion in speech (Talmy, 1985). At the same time, speakers of each language type also rely on speech patterns that *do not fit*

¹ Several researchers, studying a broader set of languages, questioned the relevance of Talmy's binary typology and suggested the possibility of adding a third type of lexicalization pattern (i.e., equipollently-framed languages) in which manner and path are expressed by two different verbs that have equal morpho-syntactic status in the clause (Slobin, 2004), such as Thai (Zlatev and Yangklang, 2004) and various Niger–Congo languages (Ameke and Essegbey, 2013). Some others (e.g., Feiz, 2011) suggested the possibility of a mixed-typological pattern, where a language carries both S- and V-framed characteristics (e.g., Farsi; see also Akhavan et al., 2017 for a similar argument).

² An earlier study (McNeill and Duncan, 2000; see also McNeill, 2000) showed that gesture might *supplement* what is conveyed in speech. Adult Spanish speakers, who typically expressed only path information in their speech about motion, used gesture to add manner to their spoken descriptions—a pattern that differed from most of the later work on the gestural expression of motion in V-framed languages (Gullberg et al., 2008; Kita and Özyürek, 2003; Özçalışkan, 2016; Özçalışkan et al., 2016a).

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