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An International Handbook on
Multimodality in Human Interaction

Edited by

Cornelia Müller
Alan Cienki
Ellen Fricke
Silva H. Ladewig
David McNeill
Jana Bressem

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Abstract

Studies on gestures in South Africa contribute to research on quotable gestures/emblems, gestural variation, language typology and co-speech gesture, cross-cultural variation and gestural pragmatics, and the relationship between culture and the nature of co-speech gesturing and its development. Studies of the quotable gestural repertoire of urban Bantu language speakers examine the semantic and structural characteristics of these gestures as well as their communicative and social functions. Social meanings attached to gestures and gestural behavior influence variation in gestural behavior based on situational context, age, gender, and social identity. Inter-ethnic comparisons show that different cultural groups ascribe different meanings and pragmatic values to gesture use and other non-verbal behaviors. Language structure influences the types of co-speech gestures Zulu speakers employ. Cross-linguistic comparative work demonstrates that cultural values shape the nature of discourse genres, such as narratives, and consequently the kinds of co-speech gestures Zulu speakers use when narrating. These differences can account for why some features of co-speech gestures develop differently in Zulu speaking children's narratives.

1. Overview

Studies of gesture in South Africa have focused on the nature, function, and social meanings of gestures and gestural use among urban Bantu language speakers in Johannesburg townships (Brookes 2001, 2004, 2005, 2011), variation in gestural behavior (Brookes 2004, 2005; Kunene 2010), cross-cultural variation in gesture and gestural pragmatics (Kunene 2010; Ribbens 2007; Schutte 2001; Scott and Charteris 1986), the nature and development of co-speech gesturing among Zulu speaking children and adults (Kunene 2010), and the influence of culture on gestural development (Kunene 2010). Opondo (2006) refers to the prominent role of gesture in South African Zulu song and dance, and there is reference in one study to the use of gesture in traditional South Sotho children's games (Ntsihlele 2007). However, these two studies do not provide any systematic analysis of gesture use. Studies on gesture in South Africa contribute to four areas of gesture research: quotable gestures/emblems, variation in gestural behavior, language typology and gesture, cross-cultural variation and gestural pragmatics, and the impact of cultural norms on gesture and gestural development.