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Speech and Gesture in Language Acquisition Studies

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Speech and Gesture in Language Acquisition Studies

Spontaneous gestures are movements of the hands and arms that people make when they speak. These gestures can parallel speech and indicate the same entities or they can complement speech and indicate an image that is not expressed in speech (Stam, 2006, 2008, in press). Together speech and gesture form an integrated system (Kendon, 2004; McNeill, 1985, 1992, 2005), and a number of empirical studies (see McCafferty & Stam, 2008, for examples) have shown that looking at gestures along with speech provides an enhanced window onto the mind to investigate language acquisition. In this talk, the presenter will provide an overview of speech and gesture research in L1 and L2 acquisition. She will discuss what gestures are and why looking at them is important for understanding language acquisition. She will present data that illustrates how looking at both speech and gesture provide researchers with a more complete picture of learners' proficiency than looking at speech alone.

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