

Multimodal demonstrations for adults and children: a cross-cultural comparison

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ABSTRACT

One of the most common contexts of human interaction is the transfer of new knowledge to other people (Tomasello, 1999; Csibra & Gergely, 2009). This setting often involves children and requires a specific “child-directed” register. We have evidence for variation both in speech (Fernald et al., 1989) and gesture (Iverson et al., 1999; Özçaliskan & Goldin-Meadow, 2011) when they are directed to young children (1-3yrs) in spontaneous interactions. However, almost nothing is known about child-directed communication with older children (Guttmann & Turnure, 1979) and in comparison with adults. Furthermore, studies on child-directed gesture usually concern demonstrations with objects (Clark & Estigarribia, 2011; O'Neill et al., 2005) and very little is known about contexts where speakers can rely only on the help of speech and gesture without the objects and in different cultures. In this talk I will present two studies investigating the role of gesture in demonstrations without objects for adults and older children. In Study 1, 18 Italian adults with no experience with children describe how to make coffee talking to a camera and imaging to talk to three different addressees: a twelve-year-old child, an adult who does not know how to make coffee and to an adult who already know how to make coffee (Campisi & Özyürek, 2013). In Study 2, 16 Italian adults in Italy and 16 Dutch adults in The Netherlands with no experience with children describe how two novel toys (the Tower of Hanoi and Camelot, a building game with blocks to arrange in a path) work to two different addressees who are present during the task: a ten-year-old child and another adult. Overall, the results show that people with no experience with children have some implicit knowledge about how to design demonstrations, both in speech and gesture, even for older children. In fact, they change the amount of their speech, the gesture rate, the perspective and the iconic properties of the gestures. These strategies are highly dependent on the nature of task and on the culture of the participants and some of them seem specifically designed for older but not for younger children.