

Subjects in the hands of speakers: An experimental study of the relationship between syntactic subject and speech-gesture patterning in narrative discourse.

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ABSTRACT

The way that speech and gesture integrate during language production depends on a great many contextual variables. This project assesses the impact of a person's focus. I demonstrate that predictions can be made about how a narrator will encode her mental representation in speech and gesture depending on which element in a scene she has been induced to focus on. To control speaker focus, I show participants a cartoon involving two elements, then manipulate which they encode as the subject of their utterance when talking about a target scene. I use two techniques to achieve the manipulation: syntactic priming and a visual manipulation of attention. Predictable differences emerge in participants' gestures depending on which element appears as the subject of their utterances. The second part of the dissertation is an examination of the relationship between lexico-grammatical, pragmatic and visuo-spatial variables in predicting the patterning of speech and gesture for three additional motion events. The goal of these experiments is to recreate in a controlled way the kinds of choices naturally made during language production.