

Gesture and the development of visuo-spatial skills in ASL as a second language

Pilar Piñar, Gallaudet University
Dennis Galvan, Gallaudet University
Susan Mather, Gallaudet University

The purpose of this study is: 1) to identify predictors for ASL L2-learning, focusing on pre-existing gestural ability, and 2) to track early ASL skill development.

Subjects were videotaped retelling ten cartoon clips in English. Nine months into learning ASL, they were videotaped retelling the same stimuli in ASL. For each subject's co-speech gesture and subsequent ASL production, we coded the following variables: 1) For role shift: a) eye gaze matches entity's eye gaze; b) facial expression matches character's emotion; c) body part movement matches character's performance. 2) For classifiers: a) handshape and palm orientation are plausible (for gesture)/ correct (for ASL), b) ability to use two simultaneous handshapes. 3) For location: a) correct locations, b) location consistency, c) ability to establish two simultaneous locations. We report which measures correlated with each other 1) from gesture (transfer) to ASL, 2) within ASL, 3) within gesture.