

**THE EFFECT OF GESTURES ON TEACHING ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE TO L2 LEARNERS: FOCUS ON IGBO-ENGLISH BILINGUALS.**

By

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**Abstract**

*Exponents of Kinesics (Cooks and Goldin-Meadow 2006) have applauded the importance of gesture in communication, especially in teaching English as a global language. This work therefore assesses the effect of gesture on teaching English parts of speech to first year students of Micheal Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Nigeria. One hundred and fifty students took part in this study. These students were divided into two groups (the control and the experimental). The control group (N=75) were taught English parts of speech without gestures while the experimental group (N=75) were taught same with accompanying gestures and pictures. Multiple choice questions containing the covered scheme were administered to the two groups. Data were analyzed using frequency distribution table. Results show that gestures and their reproduction significantly influenced the performances of the second group (which recorded pass rate of 60% as against 44% by subjects in the control group). The finding is corroborates Moreno & Mayer (2000) who argued that multimodal learning can be efficient because it conveys both auditory and visual information.*

**Keywords:** Gestures, Teaching of English, Globalization.

**Introduction**

Gestures are pivotal in human learning, development and communication across cultures. They constitute a pervasive element of human communication (Wolff-Micheal, 2001) and research has shown that even congenitally blind individuals use gestures when they talk (Iverson & Goldin Meadow, 1998). Gestures according to Kelly, Manning and Rodeck (2008, p. 49) are "a natural, ubiquitous and meaningful part of spoken language". Gestures, following Kelly et al's definition, overlap with speech and conveys message. Kendon (1997) used "gesture" to refer to any of a variety of movements - including movements of hands and arms, adjustment of posture, the touching of oneself (e.g stroking of one's hair), various (nervous) ticks, and other fiddling movements that people use while talking. A critical review of the concept of gesture as explained by Kendon above put it as a nonverbal communication mode which accompanies speech. McNeil (1992) however, made a clear distinction between gestures and speech. Gesture and speech as he claimed, convey information in different ways- speech is conventionalized and arbitrary, whereas gesture is idiosyncratic and imagistic. Gestures convey meaning globally relying on visual and

mimetic imagery whereas speech conveys meaning discretely, relying on codified words and grammatical devices. Among those who maintain that gesture and speech occur in isolation and are separate communicative systems include Butterworth & Beatie (1978) and Hadar (1989). Other scholars in the past years, however, have studied gestures and speech not as two separate components, but rather as components which interact with one another in naturalistic conversation (Godwin, 1981; McNeil 1992; Freeman & Nunez, 1999). This implies that there is no separate "gesture language" alongside "spoken language" rather gestures are integral part of language as much as are words, phrases, and sentences - gesture and language are one system (McNeil, 1992,p.2). Freeman and Nunez (1999,p. 27) made outstanding remark about gestures and speech which suggests that the two are intricately linked that "spontaneous gesture production occurs even in the face of damage to brain regions involved in motor control". Although speech and gestures overlap, studies have shown that gestures accompany speech mostly when speech reception prove difficult and when teachers want to reinforce learning (Kelly et al 2008). This implies that when a complex piece of information is coded through different modalities, it leaves some traces in the memory system. Gesture, therefore, aids in lexical retrieval. Godwin (1986) brought out another importing feature of gestures in his study. He claimed that gestures are "highly organized activities that contain temporal, spatial and social properties"(p.49). This put gestures as time specific and deictic in nature and cannot be documented over time, purposely for social interaction. Godwin's definition of gestures as "highly organized activities" excludes the use of gestures by children under the age of two who communicate to their caregivers by relying on pointing gestures to refer to objects which they do not know the names. Such gestures as used by children are not organized. Wolff-Micheal (2011) made significant characteristics of gestures which appeal this present study. Gestures have a clear beginning and ending, and have a peak structure, also referred to as stroke. For the purpose of this work, the operationalized definition of gesture include a form of non-verbal communication mode in which body actions communicate particular messages used in conjunction with speech.

Some researchers have reported impact of gestures on second language learning (Goldin Meadow2004; Pozzer-Ardenghi and Roth 2007). Goldin-Meadow (2004) carried out a study where students were examined in a rating task that did not involve gesture and where gesture reinforced the representation expressed in the spoken description. He discovered that the later students performed better than those who were taught when gesture did not reinforce the spoken description. The results showed that when gestures accompany speech in the teaching of any complex task, it provides learners a better index of mental representation than speech alone. Similar to Goldin-Meadow's work is Pozzer-Ardenghi and Roth (2007) who studied interactions between teacher-students during high school biology lessons and found that for many concepts, hand gestures provided additional clarifying input for students. They concluded that hand gestures and other visual aids provided struggling students

opportunities to decode advanced concepts that are not easily represented and taught through speech alone. Although Goldin-Meadow (2004) and Pozzer-Ardenghi and Roth (2007) works were conducted on biology and mathematics respectively, teachers can also appropriate gestures to help struggling learners in other areas or domains. Against the above background, this work tries to examine the impact of gestures on teaching English parts of speech to Igbo bilinguals.

Teaching of English to second language (L2) learner remains a great task to both teachers and analysts because the subjects in question have acquired a first language (L1) which may facilitate or inhibit the learning of the new task (language). Selinker (1972) identified strategies of second language learning, and by implication teaching as one of the factors central to the success in second language learning. If learning tasks are presented to L2 learners in a more interactive and assessable form, and learners know what actions to take in order to deal with learning tasks, they will go through easier and more rewarding learning experiences (Oxford, 1990). If the choice of teaching strategy (TS) affects learning experiences, then choosing the right TS becomes relevant issue in our daily practice as teachers. Teachers must help learners better select and use learning strategies that promote language learning effectively and independently, as well as provide learning tasks and practices that trigger the implementation of such tools. This study assesses the effect of gesture as a teaching strategy on learning experiences of Igbo English bilinguals. English has assumed the status of a global language to meet the economic and political needs of the world today (Crystal, 2003). Nkem 2004 (cited in Adedayo, 2015, p. 420) defined globalization as "the process of making things, issues, ideas, practices, development, etc worldwide or universal". Language is the vehicle through which ideas, development and practices can be made universal. More appealing to this work is the definition of Waters (1995) (cited in Adedayo 2015,p. 420) which pointed out that globalization is "the process in which the constraints of geography and socio-cultural arrangements recede, and in which the people become increasingly aware that they are receding". With the use of a widely spoken language (English), the world is globalized and such constraints as language barrier are unbounded. If tourism and trade must function effectively, and global economy function with flourishing global culture, a widely, reasonable and accessible language is requisite. Crystal, 2003 (cited in Adedayo, 2015) sees a global language as one that has developed a special role that is recognized in every country as well as one that put one in touch with the world. It is a language that is taken up by other countries given it a special role within their communities. A global language is a compliment to a person's MT and attain far more than the status achieved by other languages (Crystal, 2003 (cited in Adedayo, 2015). English is accepted in Nigeria as an official language, a language of power and prestige. This status places it above its host countries' native languages, then the need to master it. If mastery must be achieved, then teaching and learning strategies must be better put in place.

The aim of this work therefore is to determine the effect of gesture, as a teaching strategy on the learning experiences of Igbo learners of English with focus on English parts of speech?.

The English parts of or word classes are majorly divided into two: The open class or what we refer to as *content words*, and the closed class or *grammatical words*. The open class words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) are the main meaning-carrying words whose door is always open to new words. The closed class words (pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions and interjections), however, are the grammatical words whose door is closed to new words. The function of grammatical words is to make the sentences in which they occur grammatically and structurally complete. Based on the premises of earlier research that gesture can wield many benefits in teaching and learning, especially in influencing the process of information exchange between teachers and learners (Kelly et al, 2008), and the fact that the works reviewed above which recorded successful learning experiences by learners were in applied and natural sciences, this study tries to apply gesture as a teaching technique to language study to assesses its potency in the teaching and learning of parts of speech.

**Methodology**

What constituted the population of this study is one hundred and fifty (150) first year students of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike , Nigeria. These students were randomly divided into two groups, control group and experimental group. Control group were taught English parts of speech without accompanying gestures while experimental group were taught with accompanying gestures. Data were generated through multiple choice questions administered to the two groups. The questions drawn covered the area of study and focus. Data were analyzed using frequency distribution table.

**Findings**

The results of this work are presented in the table below:

**Table 1.**

Table showing the distribution of scores among the experimental group. Marks scored is over 20 .

| Scores    | 1-5 | 6-9 | 10-15 | 16-20 |
|-----------|-----|-----|-------|-------|
| Frequency | 2   | 28  | 35    | 10    |

Total no of students = 75

Mode (the score range with the highest frequency) = 10-15marks

Median = 10-15marks

Table 1 above shows that a total number of 45 students out of 75 passed the test while 30 students out 75 scored below average.

**Table 2**

Table showing the distribution of scores among the control group. Marks scored is over 20.

| Scores    | 1-5 | 6-9 | 10-15 | 16-20 |
|-----------|-----|-----|-------|-------|
| Frequency | 8   | 34  | 31    | 2     |

Mode 6 -9 marks

Median 6 -9marks

Table 2 above however, reveals that a total number of 33 students out of 75 passed the test while 42 students out of 75 scored below.

Table showing the number of passes and failures among the students under study

**Table 3**

| Teaching           | Pass | Failure |
|--------------------|------|---------|
| Experimental group | 45   | 30      |
| Control group      | 33   | 42      |

Table 3 above reveals that a total number of 45 students among the experimental group passed while only 33 students passed in the control group.

**Table 4**

Table showing percentage distribution of passes and failures among the two groups

| Teaching           | Pass | Failure |
|--------------------|------|---------|
| Experimental group | 60%  | 40%     |
| Control group      | 44%  | 56%     |

Table 4 above reveals that the experimental group recorded percentage pass of 60% and percentage failure of 40%, while the control group recorded percentage pass of 44% and failure rate of 56%.

## Discussion

Following from tables 1 to 4, teaching with gestures increased pass rate (60%) as against 44% by subjects taught without gestures. The experimental group as shown on the table above had significantly better result than the control group. The statistical difference in the performance of the experimental group suggests that the use of gestures in teaching English parts of speech to Igbo English bilinguals improved recall task. This finding is consistent with Allen (1995) study that carried out an experiment with 112 American University students in French. The students were divided into control and experimental groups. The subjects were taught 10 French sentences and their English equivalents. After evaluation, his results show that the subjects presented with illustrative gestures (experimental group) recalled more sentences than the others. The findings of this study further imply that when gestures are not related to speech production, communicative circumstances make speech reception and recall difficult which invariably recede learning experiences. When only verbal comprehensible input is made in the L2 classroom, following the report of this study, failure rate will rise as much as 56%. Gestures, therefore, promotes understanding, retention, and retrieval of comprehensible input. This study further, is in keeping with Kelly et al (2007) who reported that iconic gestures helped English speaking adults to remember novel Japanese words. In the case of Kelly et al's study, gestures facilitated retention. Another work which this present study supports is Church et al (cited in Kelly et al, 2008) who studied how gestures aided first grade Spanish speakers (with English as a second language) learn novel mathematical concepts in their second language. Their study revealed that the children improved twice as much in their understanding of the mathematical concepts when verbal instruction included gesture. Gestures reinforce speech production by adding redundancy to the verbal message (Taleghani-Nikazm, 2008).

### **Pedagogic Implication of the Study**

The pedagogic implication of this study, therefore, is that the choice of teaching and learning strategy determines learning experiences, and since gestures reinforce speech production and promote retention and recall, suggestions are made to teachers to reinforce verbal comprehensible input with gestures in their teaching practices.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, our findings reveal that teaching with gestures influence information exchange between teachers and students during lesson sessions, promoting understanding, retention, and retrieval of comprehensible input. Gestures and words, as the study further indicate, share a strong link in our mental representation, therefore, gestures are effective pedagogic tool and strategy that can affect learning experiences not only in applied and natural domains but also in English. Whatever teaching strategy that is adopted to enhance teaching and learning of English as a second and global language cannot be a wasted venture.

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**THEMATIC NARRATIONS THROUGH COSTUME**