

***When are gestures used to represent referents in discourse?:  
Studies on the multifunctionality of speech-accompanying gestures in German bimodal  
discourse production***

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Gestures are considered to be part of language and to form a tightly integrated system together with speech. Thus, when engaging in talk, speakers use a combination of speech and gestures to get their messages across. But while speech is mostly obligatory in order to communicate information to an addressee, gestures are not. Rather, during a certain stretch of discourse, there are moments in which gestures are produced and others when they are not. For instance, in the context of narrative discourse, if speakers want to introduce a new entity into the story, they will necessarily have to mention the entity in speech by using a referential expression denoting it. If they do not, the addressee will have no representation of the entity in question. When it comes to gestures on the other hand, this obligatoriness does not apply in the same way. Speakers have the possibility to but do not necessarily always accompany each mention of a discourse entity with a gesture.

In this talk, I highlight the role that the structuring of discourse plays for the presence versus absence of gestures. Specifically, I focus on the representation of discourse referents in both speech and gestures, and show that, just as speakers refer to referents differently in speech as a function of discourse context (e.g., by using fuller referring forms for new referents versus leaner referring forms for given referents), they also vary the production of gestures accordingly (e.g., by accompanying referents with gestures versus not). The findings of different studies bring to light the multifunctionality of gestures, showing that gestures can have a parallel or complementary function to speech depending on the discourse context. The studies thus further our understanding of the close relationship between speech and gestures, and advocate that gestures be considered in linguistic studies on discourse, and that connected discourse be considered in gesture studies.