

---

## **ОБЗОРЫ КОНФЕРЕНЦИЙ** **CONFERENCES**

### **ISGS7: 7<sup>th</sup> CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR GESTURE STUDIES ON *GESTURE — CREATIVITY — MULTIMODALITY* Paris, France, 18<sup>th</sup>—22<sup>nd</sup> July 2016**

Established in 2002, the ISGS (International Society for Gesture Studies) is an interdisciplinary group of researchers including anthropologists, cognitive scientists, computer scientists, linguists, neuroscientists, psychologists, and semioticians. The Society convenes for a major international conference every two years to share perspectives on the study of gesture and bodily communication. This year, the conference was held in Paris, France, July 18—22 2016 on the campus of Sorbonne Nouvelle University. The scientific coordinator was Professor Aliyah Morgenstern, (Sorbonne Nouvelle University), assisted by Dominique Boutet (University of Rouen) and Camille Debras (University Paris Nanterre).

The conference welcomed all contemporary approaches and hot topics in gesture studies, but also put special emphasis on artistic semioses, as reflected by its main theme *Gesture — Creativity — Multimodality*. This choice was directly motivated by the history of Paris as a locus of artistic creation when it comes to gesture and bodily expression. The art of mime was born in Paris at the Théâtre des Funambules in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while Etienne-Jules Marey and the Lumière brothers' first cinematographic experiments opened up the very possibility of inscribing movement on film. Going even further back in time, the creation of the first sign language school in Paris in 1760 is another landmark in the history of bodily communication.

The conference was the largest ISGS conference so far as it welcomed over 450 participants from over thirty countries. There were over 360 papers distributed across 23 symposia and individual themed sessions, as well as 85 posters. Each day, participants from the 6 to 7 parallel sessions convened in the Grand Amphitheatre for a plenary talk. This conference was a truly international event, with participants from Europe and the US but also from China, Australia, South Africa or Mexico. A lot of effort was made to make the conference accessible to the Deaf and Signing communities, with some talks being interpreted in as many as four sign languages at the same time (International Sign, British Sign Language, American Sign Language, Norwegian Sign Language).

The profound interdisciplinarity of current approaches to gestures studies was reflected in the diversity of topics and methods discussed in the presentations and in the 5 plenary talks. In the first plenary, Martha W. Alibali (U. of Wisconsin, Madison, USA) proposed an *Integrated Framework for Gesture Production and Comprehension*. She first presented evidence that gestures derive from simulated actions and perceptual states,

arguing that these mental simulations and the corresponding gestures serve to schematize spatial and motoric features of objects and events, by focusing on some features and neglecting others. She showed how, because of their ability to schematize, gestures can affect thinking and speaking in specific ways, in turn guiding listeners to schematize objects and events in particular ways. Her presentation provided evidence that gesture production and comprehension are linked, both because of their shared ties to the action system, and because gesture comprehension depends, in part, on patterns that arise due to regularities in gesture production.

Scott Liddell (Gallaudet University, Washington, USA)'s plenary talk on *Depiction and Depicting Verbs in American Sign Language* investigated depiction as a ubiquitous meaning-making strategy in Sign Languages. He first provided a rich typology of existing forms of depiction: tokens, or minimal depictions that take the form of invisible, isolated entities in the space within the signer's reach; buoys, a class of signs produced by the non-dominant hand, which also depict entities, but make the depictions visible; surrogates, which typically depict humans and may be visible or invisible; shapes or topographical scenes, including actions within those scenes. He then focused on depicting verbs, which comprise a very large category with unique lexical and functional properties (lack of a specified place of articulation, and for some, unspecified aspects of the hand's orientation; requirement to produce every instance of a depicting verb within a spatial depiction).

The third plenary talk by Cornelia Müller (European University Viadrina Frankfurt Oder, Germany) focused on *Frames of Experience — The Embodied Meaning of Gestures*. Drawing from praxeological approaches of gestures and from cognitive linguistics, she showed how gestures are a primary field to study how meaning emerges from bodily experiences. She argued that the meaning of referring and pragmatic gestures is experientially grounded in different forms of bodily mimesis. In her view, gestural mimesis never happens outside a given moment in a communicative interaction, which she refers to as frame of experience. In conventionalization processes of co-speech gestures, she explained, we can witness sedimentations of the interplay between a motivated kinesic form and aspects of context that result in 'semantizations' of form clusters and kinesic patterns. Sometimes this involves the analytic singling out of a meaningful kinesic core with particular contextualized meanings, as for example in the case of a group of gestures sharing a movement away from body.

Alessandro Duranti (UCLA, USA)'s plenary, *Eyeing Each Other: Visual Access during Jazz Concerts*, showed how jazz music players use eye gaze and other gestures as well as body postures to coordinate improvisation solos. During jazz concerts, the absence of a conductor and the expectation that what is being played is different from what is annotated on the page create a number of interactional problems that need to be resolved. Although a number of possible principles are made available by the history and culture of jazz, in most situations, the aesthetics of jazz improvisation leaves room for ambiguity about the identity of the next player and the length of each solo. Duranti showed how the gestures and body postures used in this context can only be meaningful and effective against a shared understanding of where a transition point is possible.

The fifth and last plenary was given by Catherine Pélachaud (CNRS, Télécom — ParisTech, France), on *Modelling conversational nonverbal behaviours for virtual cha-*

racters. Together with her team, she has been developing Greta, an interactive Embodied Conversational Agent (ECA) platform, which models virtual characters with socio-emotional and communicative behavior and nonverbal capacities. The ECA is able to display a large variety of multimodal communicative behaviours that are not produced in isolation from one another but take surrounding behaviours into account, based on a lexicon of temporally coordinated multimodal signs. She showed how this lexicon was built using various methodologies (corpus annotation, user-centred design, motion capture data), how behaviours can be displayed with different qualities and intensities to simulate various communicative intentions and emotional states, and described the multimodal behavior planner of the virtual agent platform.

The conference also welcomed Leonard Talmy (U. at Buffalo, USA) as a special guest, for a presentation entitled *Gestures as Cues to a Target*. With “targeting gestures”, speakers refer to something located near or far in the physical environment, and aim to get the hearer's attention on it jointly with their own at a certain point in their discourse. His main proposal was that, on viewing a speaker's targeting gesture, a hearer cognitively generates an imaginal chain of fictive constructs that connect the gesture spatially with the target. Such an imaginal chain has the properties of being unbroken and directional. The fictive constructs that, in sequence, comprise the chain consist either of schematic structures, or of operations that move such structures, or of both combined. Such fictive constructs include projections, sweeps, traces, trails, gap crossing, filler spread, and radial expansion.

The symposia, individual talks and poster presentations advanced research in areas that have now become well-established directions in gesture studies: the role of gesture in L1 and L2 acquisition, in non-typical communication (e. g. aphasia, congenital blindness, autistic spectrum disorder), links between human and primate communication from the perspective of language evolution, or the role and use of gestures in Sign Languages.

The presentations also explored new and growing directions in gesture studies, such as the continuity of certain phenomena across signed and spoken languages (e.g. symposia “Multimodal stance marking in Signed and Spoken languages”, “The role of facial expressions in signed and spoken conversations”, and “From co-speech gesture to sign. Cases of sign language creation in the Middle and South America”, talk “Palm-up in co-speech gesture and in sign language”); the role and form of gestures across the lifespan and in later life (e.g. symposium “Understanding Gesture and its Relation to Speech across the Lifespan”, poster presentation “Signing and gesturing in later life. How to adapt bodily talk in context?”). Another growing trend of study is the relation between gesture and grammar (e.g. symposium “Aspect and gesture”, talks “Manner modulation revisited: what motivates speakers of English to gesture about path and manner of motion?” or “Gesture difference in transitive/inchoative alternation”). Neurolinguistics also offer new insights on gestures thanks to brain imagery (symposium “The contributions of the left and right hemispheres to gesture production”, talks “Gesture-speech integration in time and space: a combined EEG-fMRI study” or “Using the hands to learn about the brain: Testing gesture-based instruction on brain anatomy”).

New methods and tools in gesture studies were of central concern, with ample discussions about motion capture technologies and annotation techniques from the very start of the conference, which opened with a workshop on annotation methods (NEUROGES, LASG). Methods and annotation technology were discussed all week across symposia (“Annotating (on) the Creative Body: From Research to New Tools”), talks (“Typannot: a glyphic system for the transcription of handshapes”, “KINEMO software: towards automated gesture annotation with MS Kinect”) and posters (“Advancement in the multimedia annotation tool ELAN”).

The conference’s theme *Gesture — Creativity — Multimodality* gave rise to a rich variety of presentations on the links between gesture and artistic practices, focusing on the use of gesture in music (symposium “A multidimensional and cross-cultural study of musical gesture”, and several talks about the use of gesture in conducting, such as “Spatial Metaphors Underlie Gesture in Musical Conducting” or “The ineffabilities of conducting: How choral conductors communicate using gesture”), in dance (talk “The mediator gesture in dance improvisation” and “Instruction at the Ballet Barre: Movement, Embodiment, and Gesture”), in theatre (“Combining Gesture Studies and Theatre Translation: a hands-on Approach”) and in visual arts (“Poetic gestures: Jakobson’s speech functions and their hierarchized modulation in multimodal performance acts”). Sign Language Poetry and Sign Art were also given centre stage (symposium “Quick on the draw: exploring the multimodal body through Signart”, talk “Gestural impact of poetic licence: insights from poetry in sign language”). The links between gesture, sign and artistic practices were also reflected in the conference’s social programme. The opening ceremony proposed an original documentary directed by Aliyah Morgenstern, helped by Stéphanie Caët and filmed by Coralie Vincent about French deaf and signing actress Emmanuelle Laborit, founder and director of the International Visual Theatre in Paris, and a tale from Greek mythology performed in French Sign Language by Olivier Schetrit. Several artistic workshops were organised for the participants, who could discover French Sign Language Poetry, Contact Dance (Nouma), Mime with a professional mime, as well as dance improvisation and performance.

Several talks also addressed the role of gesture in the history of arts (talks “Gesture on Ancient Maya Artifacts”, or “The Thumb Up Gesture: Hypotheses about its Rarity in the Painting from the Middle Ages to the 19th century”), and the conference participants could further discover the topic thanks to an evening tour at the Louvre Museum in Paris designed by Maud Perez-Simon (Sorbonne Nouvelle University), which guided them through the symbolic meanings of gestures in Medieval French objects and sculptures.

The business meeting of the Society was held on Wednesday July 20<sup>th</sup> and a new board was elected (see <http://www.gesturestudies.com/executiveboard.php>).

The conference was a success in many respects. It managed to bring together scholars from diverse academic backgrounds and foster friendly and open discussions in an atmosphere that constantly encouraged interdisciplinary encounters. It gave pride of place to the less known but nonetheless very rich study of gesture in art and creativity. Participants enjoyed how the conference provided multiple occasions to replace con-

temporary gesture studies within in the larger history of the domain, which brings together a variety of theoretical and epistemological heritages and traditions. At the close of the conference, motion capture technology, automated annotation techniques, brain imagery tools, virtual agents in human-computer interaction, stand out as major trends for the future of creation, innovation and research in the field of gesture studies.

The next edition of the conference, ISGS8, will probably be held in the summer of 2018 in Cape Town, South Africa.

© Camille Debras, 2016

**For citation:**

**Debras, C. (2016). ISGS7: 7<sup>th</sup> Conference of the International Society for Gesture Studies on Gesture — Creativity — Multimodality Paris, France, 18<sup>th</sup>—22<sup>nd</sup> July 2016. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, 20 (3), 266—270.**

**Bio Note:**

*Dr. Camille Debras*, Associate Professor at English Studies Department, Université Paris Nanterre. *Research interests*: multimodal analysis of spoken interaction: integration of verbal, vocal and visual resources (speech, prosody and gesture) in the construction of meaning; multimodal video corpora: interactional linguistics and conversation analysis, political discourse analysis; grammar and gesture, non-verbal expressions of stance-taking and speaker modality; discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, discourse-functional analysis, linguistic anthropology. Member of International Cognitive Linguistics Association. *Contact information*: e-mail: cdebras@u-paris10.fr.