

Say it with Gestures (Part II)

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It is probable that prehistoric man used sign language before he could speak. Humans, like animals, communicate with each other by noises, body movements and postures, but these activities usually accompany spoken language. Each culture has its own gestures to express various ideas or thoughts, and students enjoy learning these gestures and explaining the feelings behind them as part of the learning process in the target language. By getting to know the gestures in the target language and by making them an integral part of their speech, students can avoid misunderstanding and embarrassment. (After all, what may be considered a harmless gesture in one culture may be considered rude or even obscene in another.)

Studies in the field of kinesics have shown that the lexicon of human gestures includes more than 700,000 distinct and expressive movements of the hands, arms, fingers and face.¹ As a result of the research in kinesics and the use of "natural" contexts in dialogs for teaching in the target language, more and more teachers are utilizing gestures in the target language to help the students with the spoken patterns being taught. From the very first class day the teacher can teach his/her students to use gestures. The teacher, too, should use gestures in the classroom for economy and efficiency in eliciting responses, to avoid giving instructions in the native language, and to provide a time-saving device when using cues and changing from one type of activity to another. The teacher can train his/her students from the very first day of class to respond to his gestures by giving the students the gesture together with the verbal expression which will elicit the desired response. In this way, the student will become accustomed to the use and meaning of the gesture when it is used in isolation.

Some gestures that can be used in the classroom are:

Listen (carefully) :

Speak louder :

Be quiet :

Silence :

Don't repeat.

1. Cup palm of hand behind ear.

2. Hold index finger vertically
 across both lips.

1. The Origin Of Language, Life Education Reprint #25, Life International, Oct. 19, 1964 and Nov. 2, 1964, N. Y., p7.

Listen carefully. Don't repeat.

Repeat after me.

Repeat again.

The whole class.

The right side of the room.

The left side of the room.

The whole class repeats.

The left side repeats.

This group repeats.

You recite.

Think :

Wait a minute :

Take it easy :

Combine gestures 1 and 2.

3. Bend arm at elbow. Curl fingers into palm of hand, index finger extended, palm facing inward. Make small circles with index finger in front of mouth.

4. Bend arm at elbow, palm facing inward, fingers of hand together. Wave hand toward you.

5. Make a circular sweeping motion with both arms, extend arms straight out first, then bend arms at elbow and circle toward your body.

6. Same movement as 5, but use the right arm only.

7. Same movement as 5, but use the left arm only.

Combine 4 and 5.

Combine 4 and 7.

Combine 4 and 5. (Use one arm only and make a smaller sweeping motion.)

8. Point with index finger at individual student. (This gesture should be explained beforehand since in some cultures it is considered an insult to point at a person.)

9. Tap temple with index finger.

10. Bend arm at elbow, palm facing out, move hand back and forth. (Can be done with one hand or with both.)

Who knows the answer?

11. Raise eyebrows slightly, lift chin upward. (Use same movement and bend arms at elbow, extend arms outward, palms facing up.)

Change to a question.

12. Pass right hand over left hand or vice-versa.

Answer in the negative.

13. Shake head from side to side. (No)

Answer in the affirmative.

14. Shake head up and down. (Yes)

When presenting the verb tenses, the following gestures can be used:

Present of Custom (Simple Present)

1. Make a circular motion with index finger of left hand going away from your body.

Present of Moment (Present Continuous)

2. Slap table or desk with palm of hand.

Simple Past

3. Curl fingers into palm of hand, stick thumb out. Point with thumb behind you over your shoulder.

Future

4. Point with index finger straight ahead, arm extended in front of you.

When teaching the students how to pronounce certain sounds, some of the articulatory positions can be portrayed through gestures:

/ i y /

To show the students the tenseness of the / i y / sound and how the tip of the tongue presses against the lower front teeth.

1. Bend left arm at elbow, hold hand up sideways palm facing up and fingers of left hand straight up. Press tips of fingers of right hand into middle of fingers of left hand.

/ I /

2. To show the students that there is no pressure of the tongue against the teeth for / I /, use the same gesture as above except pull the fingers of the right hand slightly away from the fingers of the left hand.

/ r / and / d /

3. To show the students the position of the tongue in the alveolar ridge behind the upper front teeth.
Bend arm at elbow, turn hand sideways, palm of left hand facing down. Press tips of fingers of right hand into palm of left hand where fingers and palm are joined.

When teaching the intonation patterns, the following hand movements can be used:

2 Where are you going this weekend?

1

To indicate normal, high, and low pitch (2, 3, 1), move left hand horizontally across your chest to your left, palm down (normal pitch). Move hand up a step for high pitch. Let left hand fall down to left side for low pitch (falling intonation).

2 Are you going alone?

3

Repeat the same movement for normal intonation, move hand up a step for high pitch and glide to left.

When presenting the personal pronouns and possessives, gestures can be used in the following way:

I (me, mine)

1. Slap chest with palm of hand or point to chest with index finger.

You (yours)

2. Point to an individual or individuals.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| He (him, his) | 3. Point to a male. |
| She (her, hers) | 4. Point to a female. |
| We (our, ours) | 5. If 2 individuals are involved, combine 2 and 1, or 3 and 1, or 4 and 1. To indicate the whole group use a sweeping circular motion and No. 1. |
| They (them, theirs) | 6. Bend arm at elbow, palm facing outward and to the side. Make a waving motion away from your body and toward the group of people you wish to designate. |

Gestures can be used in teaching dialogs and in role playing.

They can be used to motivate the students to express themselves both verbally and non-verbally so that they can become involved and stimulated in their desire to communicate. We must remember that to acquire the ability to use the target language, the learner must use that language in a more meaningful situation and be able to interact with other people. Therefore, the students should be taught the gestures and the verbal utterances that accompany these gestures so that they can use them in a specific situation for creative and original response, whether it be in a dialog, role-playing or drama. How much more effective anger and frustration can be portrayed through words and gestures? Have you ever become angry at some incident while traveling in another country and felt frustrated at not being able to express this anger in the language of that country or with the appropriate gesture? Sometimes people who are afraid to express in words what could be quoted verbatim use gestures to convey meaning, because with gestures no one can quote them for what the gestures are saying. In dialogs and plays, gestures plus words make the situation more realistic and help give the speaker a feeling of spontaneity. After the teacher has demonstrated and taught the various gestures and the verbal expressions which accompany these gestures, he/she can have the class form groups of from three to six students. Within each group the students work up a dialog or play using the gestures and expressions they were taught. The teacher and/or the students may suggest situations such as:

The scene of an accident

Girl's (boy's) first date

Family situation--the teen-age son wants to get married

the teen-age daughter wants to get married

- A surprise party
- A Cocktail party
- A birthday party
- A housewarming party, etc.

The students write about the situation they choose and assign roles to each other. The teacher circulates and serves as a resource person. The written dialogs or plays are handed in to the teacher to be corrected and suggestions are made. Then the groups get together during another class period (or outside of class), and they practice their roles.

Each group presents his production to the entire class along with the appropriate gestures. After the presentation, the teacher should encourage comments and discussion and he/she should foster an understanding of the gestures used in the target culture.

How can the teacher get the students to be aware of gestures and how are they used? As an assignment, the teacher can instruct the students to leaf through a magazine and to find a picture which illustrates a gesture. They are to think about the situation in which this gesture is used, decide why the person is using that gesture, and what the person is probably saying. In class the following day, student A shows his picture to the class. Then he calls on student B to tell him what he thinks the situation is, why that person is making that particular gesture, and what he is probably saying. After student B finishes, student A tells the class whether or not he agrees with student B. If student A disagrees or wants to add more information, he tells his version of what the situation is, why that gesture was used, and what is probably being said. The class can discuss whether or not they agree with what has been said.

Students are sometimes very shy about using gestures in front of the class or group when this activity is presented for the first time. In this case it is advisable to begin with a gesture per week to reinforce meaning in a dialog or in situations and to try to incorporate each gesture and its verbal expression as part of the lesson.

Very little attention has been paid to the nonlinguistic aspects of human communication. Paralinguistics and kinesics should be included and considered in the preparation and training of both foreign language teachers and students. If gestures are used when teaching dialogs, they can speed up the learning process, especially if a nonnative teacher of English learns to use the target gestures to convey meaning to the class. By using gestures, the teacher injects more authenticity into the learning situation and portrays the nonlinguistic behavior of the native speaker of English. Moreover through the use of gestures, the student is motivated to learn and an interest in another culture is stimulated.