

# **The Ghost Partner: Joint Imagination in Reenactment**

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## **1. Introduction**

Videographical examination of an activity allows one to observe and analyze cognitive processes as they occur in real time. Unlike the static images presented in photographs or the non-visual medium of audio recordings, videotaping is able to integrate body and speech into a dynamic setting. The ability to create meaning amongst ourselves during interaction with one another is a complex process that relies heavily on bodily gestures, discourse tactics, perceptual orientation, and use of objects situated in a constantly changing environment. Much of what really occurs in daily interaction is not initially apparent due to the culturally constituted nature of structuring behavior. With the aid of videotaping technology, I hope to dissect seven seconds of real-time activity to get a glimpse of cognitive occurrences through gesture and speech situated in a real context.

The activity under scrutiny involved a Hapkido instructor, who is wearing a black belt, teaching yellow belt students how to perform a defensive move. Hapkido is a form of mixed martial arts that predominantly focuses on self-defense. Because of the physical nature of martial arts, much of the meaning being constructed is conveyed through emulation of a particular motion. Learning how to perform a defensive move requires partner work, however, since a defensive move requires one participant to play the role of an attacker. Despite this necessary component, there are times when the instructor must show the move by herself, either because there is no one competent enough to perform the activity with her or in order to demonstrate a particular aspect in detail. The instructor's ability to effectively convey a partner-oriented activity by herself relies on jointly constructed imagination. Examining speech pattern interplay with imaginative reenactment reveals the use of gestures in temporal relationship to speech, highlighting techniques, and defining deictic (give definition/explanation?) terms. Deictic words are "linguistic elements which specify the identity or placement in space or time of individual objects relative to the participants in a verbal interaction" (Hanks 5). In other words, terms such as "here" or "there" have ambiguous referents until placed in the context of the observer and speaker's situation.

## 2. Co-gesture speech

Examining the timing of gestures with corresponding speech provides a key insight into the interplay between the functions of gesture and spoken language. Although many gesture-accompanying words occur at the same instance the word is being spoken, the first segment under examination points to a possibly different use of gesture as preceding talk. In the first segment, the instructor advises students on the improper way to pull an attacker:

### Segment 1 (I = instructor)

Line	Time	Who	Talk	Gesture
1	00:17	I	So (0.5) the main <u>key</u> thing is to remember (1) don't	

As she says “don’t”, her left arm moves up from the right and down to the left. Her up and down arm action preempts what she wants to say before she explicitly states it eight seconds later. This movement seems especially out of context when line 2 states, “when you’re pulling them around” with a completely different sequence of actions. It is not until much later, at 25 seconds, that the instructor returns to her previous statement and gesture to finish what she began in line 1 with the statement “not up and down”:

### Segment 2

Line	Time	Who	Talk	Gesture
4	00:25	I	(.) <u>not</u> up and down	

In this respect, her gesture in line 1 serves to both provide a visual enactment to students of what not to do as well as aid herself in searching for the words to describe it. The students are able to see what not to do without her having to say what it is explicitly. Furthermore, the instructor herself must perform the action to continue her train of thought already started in her explanation. Despite the verbal disfluency seen by an eight second gap between the first time she explains the up and down gesture and the later attempts to clarify her point, the incoherency does not hinder the students’ understanding of what not to do. The actual words to describe the gesture in Segment 2 only serve to confirm what she had said earlier with

action. In this instance, we see co-gesture speech, as the words “not up and down” in Segment 2 serve more to accompany the already implied action of moving one’s arm in line 1 as opposed to functioning as co-speech gesture, since the gesture is leading the words of speech. The instructor’s arm movement in line 1 foreshadows the subsequent explanation.

### 3. Role Play and the Power of Imagination

In the next segment of explanation following line 1, the instructor tries to explain the proper method of pulling an attacker to the ground in the event that they attack with a punch. She looks down at her left arm and quickly swings it to her left side, while saying, “when you’re pulling them around”:

#### Segment 3

Line	Time	Who	Speech	Gesture
2	00:20	I	(.) when you’re <u>pulling</u> them around	

Here, the instructor reenacts the movements as if she were defending herself from an attacker. In line 2, her arm swings to the left while clenching her left fist as if holding onto the clothes of her attacker, even though there is no attacker. The speed at which she moves her arm in this first swing aids her emphasis on the word “pulling”. This joint physical force of arm movement in conjunction with the stressed verb incites the observing students to conceive of the force of the pull. By acting out the role of the defender, the instructor takes the perspective of the students who are learning the defensive move. In order for the students to understand her role play, they take on what Murphy calls “hypothetical mode”: “that is, purposefully seeing things as if they were something else, imaginary things created with gestures, talk, and objects” (269). Although there is clearly no one being pulled by the instructor, the students can still make sense of what is going on because they take on the hypothetical mode of pretending that she is really pulling someone. Important to note is the notion that the imagination is jointly shared, since extracting meaning from her movements relies both on her acting out the imagination as well as students effectively perceiving the imagined activity.

#### 4. Highlighting Practices

Collaborative imagination becomes a powerful tool in teaching when the instructor can dynamically modify an action to explain a point while the students still perceive it in the hypothetical mode. In the second segment, the instructor repeats the same left arm swing even slower as she states, “pull them straight around so they’ll fall”.

##### Segment 4

Line	Time	Who	Speech	Gesture
3	00:23	I	(.) pull them (0.5) straight around so they’ll fall	

By slowing down the motion of the swing this second time around, the instructor has segmented the action to allow further clarification of her statement “pull them straight around”. The straightness that she describes can now be highlighted to students. Through the discursive practice of highlighting, “structures or relevance in the material environment can be made prominent, thus becoming ways of shaping not only one’s own perception but also that of others” (Goodwin 31). What appeared to be an arbitrary quick swing of the arm in line 2 actually gains greater specification in line 3 with respect to the direction and arm angle. By slowing down the movement and directing her eye gaze towards the moving arm, she is teaching students to pay greater attention to their arm swing in order to notice the specifics of arm position and movement. The instructor can employ this highlighting technique through her role-play as a defender. In order to pick up on the highlighted task, the students must jointly imagine the activity that she is pantomiming.

#### 5. Defining Deictic References

Following the same method of role-play, the instructor now switches from the defender to acting out the movement of the attacker. As she concludes the statement “pull them straight around so they’ll fall” with “on their back”, she stands up and leans back slightly as she says “on their back”.

**Segment 5:**

Line	Time	Who	Speech	Gesture
4	00:24	I	(0.5) on their back <sup>o</sup>	

Interesting to note is the interplay of acting out the gesture of the attacker while verbally speaking through the perspective of the defender. In the previous two lines, the instructor acted out the role of a defender pulling an imaginary attacker onto the ground while using the referent “them” to refer to the attacker. Looking at line 4, however, the instructor continues to speak from the perspective of the defender who will fall on their back, except that she switches her gesture to match how the attacker will react. As active observers, the students need to be able to distinguish the switch in role in the instructor’s gestures while maintaining the understanding that the term “their” is still referring to the attacker as it did in the previous lines. Deictic terms such as “them” and “their” are defined through various referential practices that make use of “‘recipient design’, which refers to the ways in which utterances are designed with regard to the particulars of the here and now and the specific co-participant” (Hindmarsh, Heath 1866). Recipient design is employed by the instructor who has tailored her explanations with regards to the listener. Because she had previously established the perspective of the defender in both action and words, the assumption is that the referent remains the same despite the change in gestural perspective. Thus, the students are able to make sense of “their” in line 3 as referring to an attacker while observing a change of role.

**6. Conclusion**

In examining and categorizing how people construct and convey meaning, one becomes aware of the complexity of seemingly natural performances of speech. Even within the eight seconds of video analysis, the informant has already employed a multimodal approach of explaining a defense move to students. With speech, the instructor has instinctually stressed particular words of interest, as apparent in the detailed transcription. In gesture, bodily action not only serves to prompt explanation but can also engage an audience in interactive imagination of role-play. Deictic terms become used and defined by the context of the environmentally situated activity where students and the instructor all have a mutual understanding of what is being referenced. With this in mind, we realize that the ability to carry on interpersonal communication is a daily event involving a multitude of facets that cannot be underestimated.

## References

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