

ABSTRACT

GESTURAL PERCEPTION: A COMPARISON OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN THE USE OF GESTURE

Though language-specific differences in communication exist, communicative gesture has been proposed as an innate, universal “language” that underlies variation in spoken language.

This research analyzed the ability of participants from different language and cultural backgrounds to recognize one another’s communicative gestures. The two native languages examined were California English and Mandarin Chinese. All participants were filmed performing directional, spatial, and conservation tasks. Later, the films were viewed by another group of native Californians who tried to determine which tasks were being performed from the visual displays of gesture alone. After testing, participants were asked to complete a survey to assess their ability to determine gender, culture, and difficulty of tasks. Implications for this data concerning contemporary theories of gestural communication are discussed.

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