

Decoding Causal Events: Insights from Spanish Gestural Patterns

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Every day all speakers linguistically encode the relationship between causes and effects, regardless of the language in which they express themselves. However, not all languages divide and encode the causal information continuum in the same way (Sanders et al. 2009, Sanders and Sweetser 2009, and Kwon 2012.). Previous psycholinguistic studies on causality on Spanish have revealed that these speakers, when talking orally about causal relationships, usually draw their attention to the agent's type of involvement (accidental or intentional) in the development of the causal action (Gibbons 2003, Ibarretxe-Antuñano 2012, Ariño-Bizarro and Ibarretxe-Antuñano 2018, 2020, and Melis 2020). Moreover, the key role of intentionality becomes evident not only in the variety of speech encoding options available in this language (Ibarretxe-Antuñano 2012), but also in the way speakers categorise and recall these events (Filipović 2013, and Ibarretxe-Antuñano et al. 2016). However, the role of gesture in the encoding of intentionality of caused motion in this language has not been explored in detail yet.

Based on these studies, this talk investigates (i) the gestural encoding of agentivity in causality events, and (ii) the possible alignment (division of labour) and correlation between gestural and speech expressions in these events. Data were collected using Causality Across Languages project's videoclip stimuli (NSF BCS-1535846), a set of 58 live action videos of interactions among humans, natural forces and inanimate objects. Thirty-two native European Spanish speakers (from Aragón) participated in a verbal description task, where participants responded to the question "what happened?". All data were transcribed and encoded with ELAN (Lausberg and Sloetjes 2009).

Results show that intentionality in Spanish is fundamental not only cognitively, but also discursively, both in speech and in gestures. As far as the speakers' multimodal encoding, data show that these speakers choose a different gestural viewpoint and focus on a different type of semantic information based on the type of intentional causal event performed in the stimuli. In stimuli with intentional causal actions, speakers prefer the character's point of view and provide Path + Manner information combined in their gestures. In stimuli with accidental causal events, on the other hand, informants take the observers' viewpoint and describe Path information alone. Moreover, these gestural preferences are significantly correlated with co-speech. Transitive constructions are aligned with the character's viewpoint gestures which congruently express high agency and, consequently, high intentionality and responsibility (as shown in Chan and Kelly 2021).

Keywords: causality, gestural viewpoint, agentivity, Spanish, intentionality, cognition, multimodal description

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