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Age Shapes Silent Gesture in European Spanish

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Abstract

Silent gesture provides a unique window into how humans map meaning onto the body without speech. While prior work has identified cross-linguistic regularities in iconic strategies (Ortega & Özyürek, 2019a, b), the role of age in shaping these mappings remains unclear. Here, we test whether age predicts the selection of iconic strategies (acting, drawing, representing, personification) in European Spanish. Thirty monolingual participants (n = 10 per group) from three age groups (3-5; 19-22; 51-58) produced gestures for 42 stimuli across five semantic categories. Coding reliability was assessed on a subset of the data ($\approx 91\%$ agreement). Results show robust age-related differences in both gesture complexity and strategy choice (p s < .001). Multinomial regression further indicates that categorical age group and semantic category jointly predict gesture technique ($R^2 = .32$, $p < .001$). These findings suggest developmental and/or cohort-related shifts in how meaning is iconically represented across the lifespan.