UNIVERSITY OF ZAGREB

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

TEFL SECTION

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF THE APPLICATION OF GESTURES IN TEFL CLASSROOM

Graduation thesis

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Zagreb, 2017.

Teachers' perception of the application of gestures in TEFL classroom

Abstract

In modern classrooms, the emphasis is still put on the four essential skills (reading, listening, writing and speaking). Therefore, an important part of the multimodality of language and communication is excluded, and learners may not reach their potential communicative competence. One of the excluded modes of communication are gestures, i.e. hand and body movement that accompany the speech and provide further information. It seems that gestures are rarely the selected focus in TEFL classrooms due to their subconscious and automatic nature, even though they are an important factor in the facilitation of communication. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to examine the teachers' perception of the application of gestures in TEFL classroom. Therefore, a qualitative study involving Croatian teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) was conducted and its primary aim was to investigate the extent to which they report to use gestures in classrooms. Our expectation was that teachers would concede that they rarely focus on gestures but, after raising their awareness of the importance of gestures, teachers would become interested in them, and results showed that: a) teachers do not focus on the use of gestures, and b) they are willing to incorporate gestures in their classes. Furthermore, this thesis contains a section about The Distributed Little Red Hen Lab (Red Hen Lab), which is a global laboratory and consortium for research into multimodal communication and gestures.

Key words: *gestures, TEFL, teachers, language acquisition, multimodality, Red Hen Lab*

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1 Introduction

Modern approach to teaching languages is more extensive than traditional approaches. Teachers are encouraged to use modern technologies and techniques and direct the attention of their students on the aspects of language teaching that were not specifically addressed in the past, such as the cultural aspect. However, we believe that the scope of the communication that is focused on today is incomplete since it does not encompass the whole spectrum, and not every aspect is covered. One of them is the nature and use of gestures.

During primary and high school education in Croatia, and even during first years in college, teachers in Teaching English as foreign language (TEFL) classrooms pay no attention to gestures and rarely even mention their function in language. This is especially evident during compulsory education, where most of the English language classes are performed in a traditional way: the never-ending cycle of learning new words, repeating grammar rules, occasional writing assignments, and comprehension tests. However, in order to reach a high level of proficiency in language and develop communicative competence, extralinguistic features of language have to be taken into account and taught to learners.

Gestures are usually taken for granted and perceived as something subconscious and automatic, and therefore not worth focusing on in class. This is a consequence of the fact that they are often overlooked during the education of teachers. Gestures are a part of the multimodality of language and communicative competence, and they need to be taken into account, and teacher's perception of their application in foreign language classrooms should be changed. We think that teachers should receive proper education about gestures in order to maximize the scope of communication they will be able to present to their students, and therefore grasp the importance of gestures in language and start incorporating them in their classes. By shifting the focus, new generations of learners are likely to become more competent in their second language (L2), both in classroom and in everyday communication.

Red Hen Lab's effort to develop an artificial intelligence (AI) software that will use the data provided by Red Hen Lab's researchers to automatically recognize and annotate gestures has a great potential and many possible applications in EFL. Explicitly, by analyzing gestures used in everyday communication, enormous amounts of data will be gathered and analyzed, thus providing further theoretical background and examples of practical application, which can be used for the education of teachers.

2 Mutimodality of language

In everyday communication, the scope of language covers more than it does in controlled and largely isolated environments such as classrooms. The tendency to focus on the four skills (reading, listening, writing, speaking) is somewhat justified in a sense that the primary goal of language learning (and teaching) is to achieve a high level of proficiency in those four skills. However, the language itself should not be constrained to these four skills – in order to fully capture and convey the meaning, the multimodality of language has to be taken into account. According to the theory of communication and social semiotics, multimodality of communication consists of five different modes - textual, aural, linguistic, spatial, and visual (Murray, 2013, p. 51). Therefore, messages are generally conveyed as a combination of these five modes.

In an instance when there is no visual mode, a part of the message (or whole message) can be misunderstood, and therefore, the meaning changes. This inevitably leads to the conclusion that multimodality is an essential factor of everyday communication. People use the multimodal aspect of communication automatically; one could argue that we process and produce the incoming signals (visual, aural and spatial) without significant cognitive effort most of the time.

Nevertheless, the whole multimodality of language is rarely explored in TEFL. According to Kress,

> the so-called literate Western societies have for too long insisted on the priority of a particular form of engagement, through a combination of hearing and sight: with the sense of hearing specialised to the sounds of speech, and the sense of sight specialised to the graphic representation of sounds by ‘letters’, on flat surfaces (Kress, 2000, p. 184).

Therefore, the insistence on a generally bimodal approach hinders our expression of meaning in other modes of communication. For example, the sense of sight could and should be used to examine the body language of a speaker or a listener, since body language also conveys meaning.

This is further supported by Langacker, who argues that “manual gestures […], facial expressions, actions performed more globally (e.g. a shrug), and even factors like posture and body language [...] may all be closely bound up with linguistic expressions, in which case they

can hardly be excluded from 'language' on an a priori basis" (Langacker, 2008, p. 250). Consequently, gestures can be considered as a part of the language.

3 Communicative competence

However, the theory alone is not enough to be a proficient user of a language. Learners ought to know how to use their knowledge of a language to communicate successfully, and proficiency requires a certain level of communicative competence. The term was first introduced by Hymes (1972) who described it as a composite view of competence based on rules for language use, acceptability and appropriateness, thus shifting focus of competence from grammaticality alone. Further distinction was made by dividing it between communicative competence on the one hand, and actual communication on the other. Communicative competence was seen as the underlying knowledge and skills required to use given language, while actual communication was perceived as the realisation of these elements under restrictive psychological and environmental conditions (Canale 1981; 1983; Canale & Swain 1980). Therefore, communicative competence can be described as a verbal and non-verbal manifestation of the whole multimodality of language, where the competent speaker uses his knowledge of a language in order to transmit messages through the communication channel. By reaching higher levels of communicative competence, L2 learners will become able to convey messages with ease and without misunderstandings, that is they will become fluent in L2.

4 Gestures in the English language

Gestures have always been an integral part of the communication. According to Gerwing and Bavelas, "gestures are the conversational hand movements that people integrate with their words to convey meaning to each other in a dialogue" (Gerwing and Bavelas, 2013, p. 882). However, people use gestures without any spoken words, as well as in monologues, when they are alone, on the phone, and in many other situations that cannot be described as a dialogue. Therefore, gestures can be defined as "a multiplicity of communicative movements, primarily but not always of the hands and arms" (McNeill, 2006, p.58). McNeill highlights that "gestures and language are best thought of as a single system, larger than either language or gesture are traditionally assumed" (McNeill, 2006., p. 58). Thus, gestures and speech complement each other.

This connection between gestures and language is evident from young age since people often start using gestures even before they are able to produce any meaningful utterances, i.e.

even before attaining any level of proficiency in any given language. For example, even very young babies know how to point towards a toy or another object. This signifies that the ability to produce and recognize gestures does not cause a significant cognitive load on human brains. Therefore, humans are cognitively able to discern between different gestures even during early years of their life. Even though gestures are used without language during early childhood, they do represent a primitive form of communication that develops over time. Consequently, through extensive use of gestures and language acquisition, producing and recognizing gestures becomes an automatic, subconscious ability that merely accompanies spoken words. Gestures become a social utility, a tool used in a communicative channel to eliminate possible problems in the transmission of a message. Therefore, various types of gestures emerged during time.

4.1 Classification of gestures

Due to the sheer number and unpredictability of gestures in everyday life, there have been multiple attempts to classify them. Two of the classifications that encompass the vast majority of gestures in English languages are Gullberg's (2010) characterization and McNeill's (2006) classification.

According to Gullberg, gestures are systematically characterized in three categories that highlight their connection with the language:

1) Structural,
2) Semiotic,
3) Functional terms. (2010, p. 77)

Structurally, gestures can be described in terms of articulators (e.g., the hand, the head) and their configurations (e.g., hand shapes), the place of articulation (e.g., where in gesture space), and the form and direction of the movement (Stokoe, 1980).

Semiotically, gestures are described as representational gestures that convey meaning by iconically depicting or illustrating some aspect of what is talked about (iconic, metaphoric gestures), or by spatial contiguity and proximity to the considered entity (deictic, indexical gestures) (Gullberg, 2010, p. 77). Furthermore, gestures can also be rhythmic (which mark scansion), interactive (which refer to some aspect of conversation itself.), fully lexicalized (fixed form-meaning, such as Victory sign), and less or non-conventionalized (without established standards of well-formedness) (Gullberg, 2010, p. 77).

Lastly, in functional terms, gestures are described by examining how a range of social, psychological, contextual, and cultural factors that guide human interaction – much like speech, influences them (Gullberg, 2010, p. 78). Although these conditions generate a wide variety of gestures in different environments, individual gesture production is realized within the boundaries of culturally – and linguistically – determined repertoires. (Gullberg, 2010, p. 78).

On the other hand, McNeill provides a more detailed and comprehensive classification of gestures by dividing them into five main categories:

1) Gesticulation,
2) Speech-framed gestures,
3) Emblems,
4) Pantomime,
5) Signs. (McNeill, 2006, p. 58-60)

McNeill characterises gesticulation as a "motion that embodies a meaning relatable to the accompanying speech" (McNeill, 2006, p. 58) and notes that gesticulation is by far the most frequent type of gesture in daily use, made chiefly with the arms and hands but not restricted to these body parts. Therefore, gesticulations appear at the same time as speech, and therefore are considered to be coverbal gestures.

Furthermore, gesticulations are divided into four more specific semiotic categories – iconic gestures, metaphoric gestures, deictic gestures and beat gestures. (McNeill, 2006, p. 58)

According to the author, iconic gestures are gestures that present images of concrete entities and/or actions. An example of an iconic gesture is a person imitating a gun with his hand and pulling an imaginary trigger.

Metaphoric gestures, on the other hand, represent the polar opposite to iconic gestures since they depict abstract entities or a concept. McNeill notes that they are "not limited to depictions of concrete events. They can also picture abstract content, in effect, imagining the unimageable". For example, a speaker says that she is pregnant and imitates cradling the baby in her hands.

Deictic gestures are, evidently, gestures of pointing towards an entity or an imaginary object. The most frequent deictic gesture is an extended index finger pointing at a pertinent direction. Although deictic gestures mostly point to physically present objects and locations,

McNeill asserted that they can also point to imaginary entities, which is known as abstract pointing or *deixis at phantasma*.

The last subcategory of coverbal gesticulations are beats, since, according to McNeill, they appear as "mere flicks of the hand(s) up and down and back and worth, zeroing in rhythmically on the prosodic peaks of speech". Due to their nature, they serve as highlighters of important information in speech.

Moreover, four other types of gestures (speech-framed gestures, emblems, pantomime and signs) are not necessarily accompanied by speech. Specifically, speech-framed gestures are part of the sentence itself in a way that they occupy a slot in a sentence (McNeill, 2006, p. 59). For example, a speaker says "He was driving a bike when he…" and then signalizes a fall with his hand.

Emblems or conventionalized signs are the only category of gestures which is codified and shared by all speakers of the same language (McNeill, 2006, p. 59). These gestures, such as the aforementioned Victory sign (presented in Figure 1) or raised middle finger, have fixed meaning(s) and can function with or without speech, although speech can alter their meaning. However, their meaning can differ from culture to culture, or even change through time. For example, the Victory sign (palm held outwards, with extended index finger and middle finger, while other fingers are clenched) started as a sign of victory during the Second World War but became a symbol of peace during the Vietnam War.

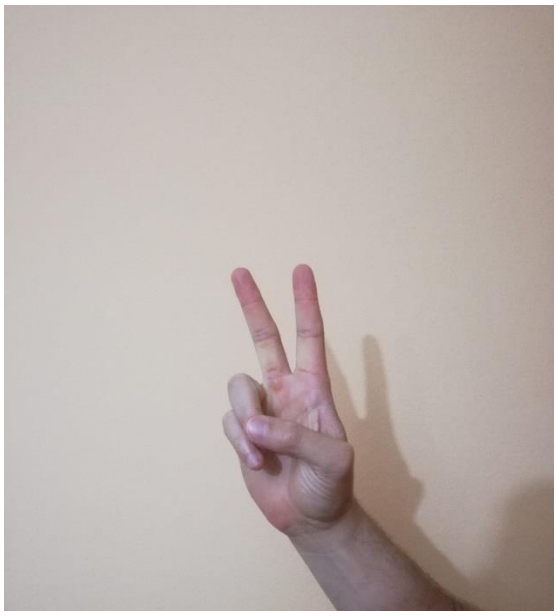

Figure 1. The victory/peace sign

Finally, pantomime is defined as a gesture or a sequence of gestures that convey a narrative line while produced without speech while signs are lexical words in a sign language (McNeill, 2006, p. 59).

4.2 Multimodality of gestures

The multimodality of gestures is obvious from their definition: they are visual cues, and spatial in nature. For example if a speaker says "Get out!" and points to the door with his hand and index finger, the gesture is a visual cue (by pointing to the exact door) and spatial (hand movement). However, linguistic mode of gestures is not always clear, and it is still debatable according to a majority of linguists. Some of them do concede that gestures can often be linguistic in nature, although that is not always the case. As Zima noted:

> Construction Grammar is concerned with the linguistic symbols that constitute our language system. Despite the fact that many cognitive linguists seem to be increasingly willing to support a view of language as also involving gesture, posture, facial expressions and other forms of bodily behavior, the focus of Construction Grammar has almost exclusively been on purely verbal structures (Zima, 2014, p. 15).

Yet, there has been a shift in the Construction Grammar viewpoint, and gestures are seen as more than purely verbal symbols. However, Langacker notes that not all gestures qualify as linguistic (Langacker, 2008, p. 251)

Following the Constructionist's view, Zima argues that "for co-speech gestures to be reasonably assumed as part of a construction (both its form and its meaning), the combination of a verbal pattern and a given gesture has to be entrenched as a unit in the minds of speakers and conventional in the speech community" (Zima, 2014, p. 15). Therefore, the aforementioned example of an utterance ("Get out!") with a gesture of pointing is both linguistic, spatial and visual in nature, thus proving that gestures relate to more than two modes of communication.

On the other hand, due to their spatial nature, gestures are not textual nor aural *per se*. They cannot be incorporated in texts in a way that reflects them in a proper spatial way, and they rarely produce any meaningful sound (e.g., the sound of fast hand movement through the air carries no meaning; it is purely background noise or the noise in the communication channel).

4.3 Gestures and communicative competence

Communicative competence, as mentioned before, consists of the underlying knowledge and skills required to use given language, and the realisation of these elements under restrictive psychological and environmental conditions. Conversations are a type of those realisations, and people tend to use gestures during conversations. Consequently, gestures are seen as related to speakers' overall communicative effort (Kendon, 1984; 1994). Furthermore, gestures are seen as verbal to the same extent as speech due to common underlying representation and seen as closely connected to language as equipotent reflections of thought with different output channels (Gullberg, 1998). Gullberg stated that, due to their connection, gestures and language are perceived as interdependent, since one is not a translation of the other.

Therefore, gestures should be considered as part of communicative competence, since they are another form of realisation of underlying knowledge and skills required to use a certain language. During communication, especially face-to-face conversation, they convey further meaning and therefore add meaning to speech.

5 Gestures in TEFL classrooms

Due to the multimodal nature of gestures and their close connection to the language, it seems reasonable to focus on them in EFL classrooms. Gestures as non-verbal forms of language can modify speech and context, thus adding pertinent information that is crucial for understanding. However, gestures and their frequency and meaning differs in different cultures and languages. Even though little is known about real differences between cultures and languages with respect to speech-associated or spontaneous gestures, differences do exist, and they can be assumed to pertain not only to culture, but also to various factors, such as region and socio-economic status (Gullberg, 1998, p. 54). Therefore, students should be informed and taught about cultural differences if they are to reach high level of communicative competence in their L2. This can be accomplished by educating L2 learners about gestures and their role in the language and enticing them to perform and adapt their gesticulations while using L2.

Furthermore, gestures are an integral part of interlanguage, which we may assume is of great importance to L2 learners. According to Selinker, "The process of learning a second language (L2) is characteristically non-linear and fragmentary, marked by a mixed landscape of rapid progression in certain areas but slow movement, incubation or even permanent stagnation in others" (Selinker, 1972., p. 211). Selinker notes that the term interlanguage denotes learners' developing second language knowledge, which consists of some

characteristics influenced by previously learned languages (or his L1), some characteristics of the L2, and some general characteristics that often occur in various interlanguage systems, such as excessive gesturing. Therefore, learners who have not yet fully developed their L2 will tend to use gestures to convey meaning and enhance their production.

However even though important, gestures are often overlooked or briefly mentioned without stressing their significance.

6 The Distributed Little Red Hen Lab

The Distributed Little Red Hen Lab (Red Hen Lab) is a global laboratory and consortium for research into multimodal communication, founded by Francis Steen and Mark Turner. Its primary goal is to create a massive systematic corpus of ecologically valid multimodal data, along with new tools and practices to analyze given data, which is acquired by systematically recording audio-visual news broadcasts and supplementing the resulting dataset with other audio-visual records (Steen and Turner, 2013, p. 256).

Red Hen is organized as a cooperative of engaged researchers from all over the world who collaborate closely and contribute power and content to Red Hen Lab) and hence to each other and to future researchers. By developing various tools – theoretical, computational, technical and statistical – Red Hen Lab) aims to advance research in any study of multimodal communication, including any area in which there are records of human communication. Therefore, the possible usefulness of Red Hen Lab) is immense, since it can be applied to any language and almost any form of communication. According to Steen and Turner:

> "Red Hen's core dataset consists of the NewsScape Library of International Television News, housed and maintained securely at the library of the University of California, Los Angeles . . . NewsScape consists of roughly 200,000 hours of broadcast network news, in a variety of languages . . . They include roughly a billion words of timestamped closed-captioned texts, and roughly a billion words of transcripts. Red Hen ingests another hundred hours or so of global network news daily . . . Red Hen has developed code for putting transcripts, where they exist, into time-stamped registration with the closed-caption text and aligning both with the audiovisual stream. Red Hen is also extracting on-screen text with optical character recognition and exploring ways to deploy speech-to-text transcription for broadcasts that lack closed-captions" (2013, p. 258-9)

6.1 Collaboration with Red Hen Lab and ELAN

In February 2017, the Croatian Branch of Red Hen Lab was formed in accordance with Mark Turner. The participants (Valentino Jakšić and Jurica Korade, both from Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb) agreed to manually annotate video clips from news as a form of collaboration with Red Hen researches from all over the world. The annotation is done in a computer program called ELAN (version 5.0.0), developed by The Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics. ELAN is a professional tool for the creation of complex annotations on video and audio resources, and therefore one of the most important tools used by Red Hen annotators.

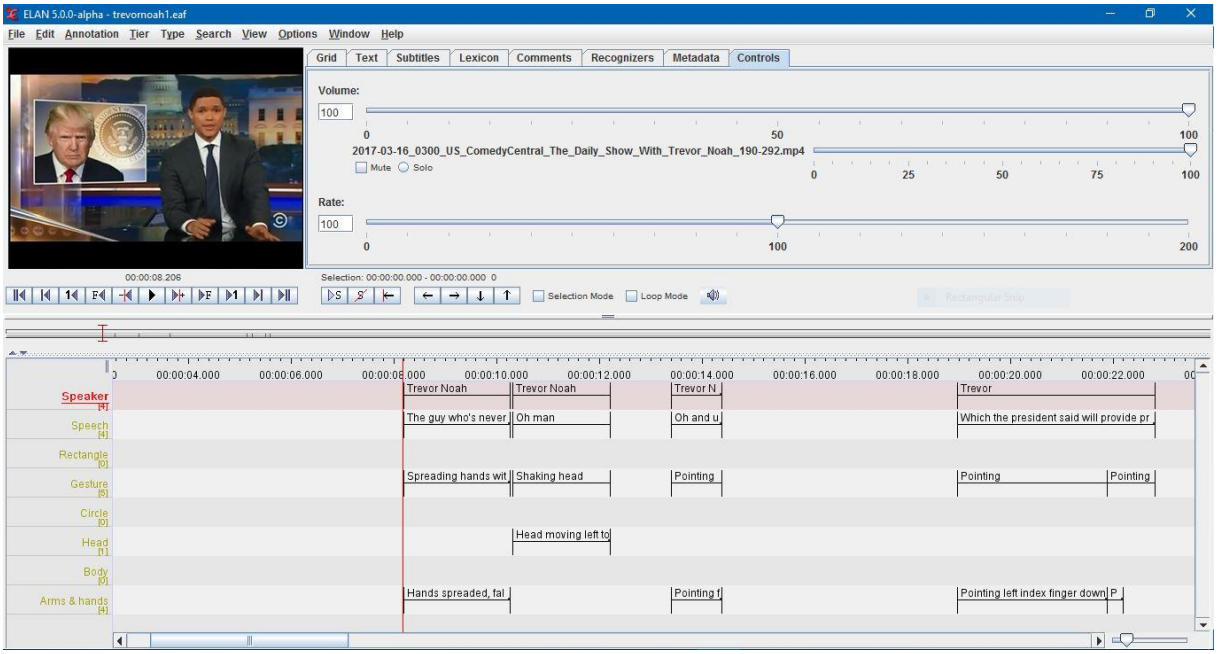

Figure 2. ELAN's interface

ELAN's interface (presented in Figure 2) is clear and simple. It is divided into three main sections: video preview section, annotation grid and annotation field. Video is played in the top left corner, and annotations are added live, i.e. while watching the video. Due to excellent control options, user can precisely select the exact timeframe in which the gesture happens in the zoomed-in annotation grid. After selecting the timeframe, the user needs to enter the annotation information in the annotation grid (presented in Figure 3). Every annotation has several fields (speaker, speech, rectangle, gesture, circle, head, body, arms & hands); however, due to the nature of gestures, none of them is mandatory because not every gesture conforms to all listed requirements.

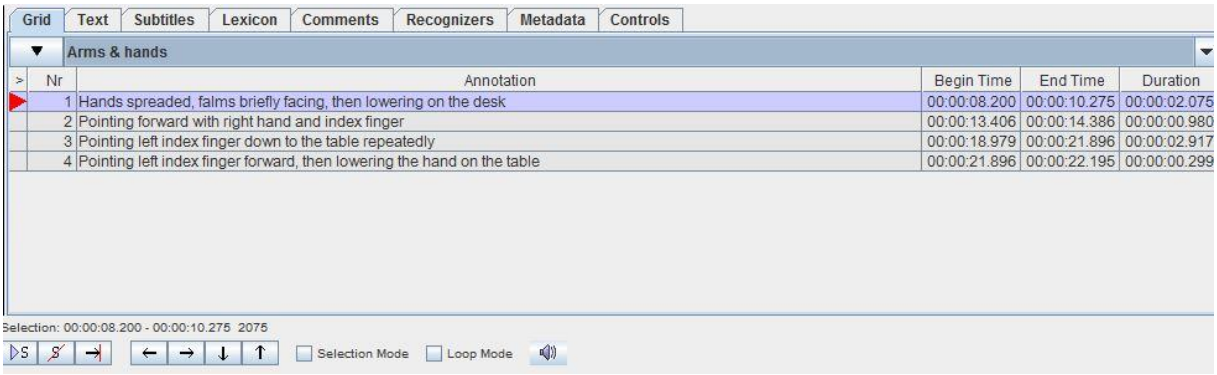

Figure 3. Annotation grid example

In the "speaker" (presented in Figure 4) field, the user is required to enter the name of the speaker while the "speech" field requires a transcript of speech that happened in the exact timeframe. The "gesture" is used to describe the gesture in general, while fields "head", "body", and "arms & hands" (see figure 3) is used to signify which part of the body was active during the gesturing, as well as for detailed description of the gesture. Finally, in the "rectangle" and "circle" field no text is entered; the user draws a rectangle in the video to establish who is the speaker and performer of the gesture, and after that he draws a circle to signify the area in which a gesture occurred.

Figure 4. Annotation field

By annotating the video in accordance with these requirements, users contribute to the development of artificial intelligence (AI) software that will use the final data from the Red Hen Lab's database in order to automatically recognize and annotate the gestures. This collaboration will result in various tools that will be useful across a range of tasks, including automated data acquisition, joint text, sound, and vision parsing, statistical analysis, multimodal search engines, user interfaces, presentation tools, publishing platforms, and pedagogical applications ("@redhenlab", 2017). Therefore, Red Hen Lab's tools will be useful for teachers

since they will provide a completely new insight into gestures and multimodality of communication, therefore helping teachers to devise new content and tasks for learners.

7 Previous research

The focus of this study was on teachers' perception and attitudes about the use of gestures in TEFL classrooms with learners whose L1 is Croatian. Before presenting the study and its results, a brief overview of previous research on gestures and L2 acquisition in general will be given, since no similar studies (especially involving Croatian teachers of English) have been conducted or published up to this day.

Mohan and Helmer's (1998) study of children of various L1's learning English as L2 compared their extent of understanding typical English emblems such as "yes", "I don't know", and "be quiet" to age-matched native children. The findings suggest that non-native children understood significantly fewer gestures than their native counterparts, suggesting not only that emblems are cultural artefacts that need to be learned, but also that acculturation is necessary for their acquisition.

Another study by Hauge (2000) examined how learners of British English (BrE) understood emblems and conventionalized BrE gestures, and found out that some teaching emblems (individual gestures made by teachers) were a source of confusion to language learners for whom these gestures often signified a very different meaning in L1.

A study by Jungheim (1991) examined whether Japanese learners of English learned the meaning of American emblems better when provided with explicit instruction or when they were merely exposed to them without any explanation. The results suggest that the group of learners who received traditional instruction performed better.

McCafferty's (2002) study, in which he examined the interactional effect of learners' gestures, showed that learner's use of gesture played an important role in promoting language use by facilitating positive interaction between the non-native and native participants. He concluded that learner's gestures may be critical for promoting learning since they promote continued output.

Gullberg (1998) reports that native speakers rated learners whose formal proficiency was very low but who used gestures strategically as more proficient than learners who were formally more proficient but used less gestures.

Studies performed by Allen (1995) and Tellier (2008) show that adult English learners of French and French children learning English retain significantly more expressions at a post-test if words are presented with gestures than learners who receive no gesture input with new words.

Finally, a study by Gerwing and Bavelas (2013) found that people mostly use gestures in social settings and if the addressee responds to them. However, the form of gestures, depends on the addressee's is visibility to the speaker, since participants tend to produce more interactive gestures in face-to-face interaction than in setting in which they cannot see the addressee. In addition to that, the study established a correlation between gestured and shared knowledge of the participants. Namely, if participants had no shared knowledge, they produced more complex gestures.

It is evident that results of previous research dealing with gestures in SLA suggest benefits of gestures in the process of acquisition. However, further research is needed, especially connected to the people who influence learners the most – their teachers.

8 Research

The purpose of this research was to determine teachers' perception of the use of gestures in TEFL classroom in Croatia. This section outlines research question, hypotheses and goals, as well as describing the sample and the instrument followed by the data analysis, results and discussion.

8.1 Research questions, hypotheses and goals

Having considered the existing theoretical and empirical findings, the following research questions surfaced:

1. Do Croatian teachers of English incorporate gestures and intentional gesture teaching in their classes?
2. Are Croatian teachers of English willing to teach about gestures in their classes?

The following hypotheses were formed from the above research questions:

a) Teachers rarely (if ever) focus specifically on gestures in their classes.
b) Teachers may be willing to include gesture teaching in their classes if properly educated and informed about the advantage of teaching gestures.

8.2 Sample

Due to the nature of the research, three different schools were selected. The sample consisted of three English teachers working in three different classes in three different schools: XVIth Gymnasium, Primary school Cvjetno Naselje and Primary school Vrbani (all in Zagreb, Croatia). The average teaching experence of the selected teachers were 19,67 years and their average duration of studying English language in formal education was 16 years. There were two female teachers (N=2, or 66,67%) and one male teacher (N=1, or 33,33%), while the number of languages that participants are fluent in varies from two (2) to seven (7); the average being four (4). Furthermore, teacher one (T#1) taught only high schoolers, T#2 taught English to all age groups and T#3 taught in primary school and adults.

Based on this data, it can be concluded that the three participants differ; although they have the same level of education and nearly identical level of experience, they taught various age groups and speak different FLs. However, this variety is intentional – it allows the researcher to gain different perspectives into gestures in TEFL classroom.

8.3 Instrument

Only one instrument was used. It was devised by the researcher, and it consisted of three parts, which are described thoroughly below.

In the first part, selected participants were required to provide general info on their experience and qualifications, the number of languages they spoke and to rate the general proficiency of their learners. Moreover, they were asked to give their definition of gestures.

The second part consisted of 23 statements which measured teacher's personal stance on gestures (15) and their use of gestures in the classroom (8). In the questionnaire Likert scales were used - participants read the statement and estimated the degree to which they agree with it (1 – strongly disagree, 2– disagree, 3 – neither agree nor disagree, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree).

Finally, after the second part, a short task involving gestures was performed with students. The teachers were instructed to evaluate the task, and were asked six descriptive questions to express their opinions and/or criticisms.

8.4 Procedure

The research was carried out in May 2017 in the aforementioned schools: XVIth Gymnasium, Primary school Cvjetno Naselje and Primary school Vrbani (all in Zagreb,

Croatia). The researcher contacted the selected participants who all agreed to take part in the research. Furthermore, the teachers obtained the all the necessary approvals and consents since students were also supposed to take part in the research, albeit indirectly. At the beginning of the research, the researcher introduced himself and explained the goals of his research. Furthermore, he emphasized that the participation was voluntary and anonymous. All students that were present agreed to participate, as did the teachers. The research was performed in English classes with following age groups: lower primary school, upper primary school and high school. It took about 25 minutes.

Even though the focus was on the teachers' perception, students were required to participate in order for teachers to evaluate the possible use of gestures in classroom since our expectation was that they rarely focus on them. The involvement of students was of great importance since the aim was to investigate the teachers' perception in their own teaching environment with their learners involved. Therefore, students were asked to cooperate by participating in a task[1] abut gestures while teachers observed and evaluated the task by filling out the questionnaire.

Firstly, the researcher introduced the concept of gestures to students and explained the term if needed. Simultaneously, the teachers solved the first and second part of the questionnaire. Secondly, a muted video clip of a talk show was played twice to the students and teachers alike. Students were instructed to pay close attention to the speakers and try to spot as many different gestures as possible and figure out the possible meaning those gestures might have. Shortly after, the video was played for the second time, this time with instruction to observe the body language and posture of each speaker. The second part took around 5 minutes, since the duration of the video clip was 2:12 minutes. Finally, another discussion about gestures was elicited by asking students about the video they just saw. Students generally cooperated, both by providing their ideas and performing the gestures they saw. During the second discussion, which lasted about 10 minutes, the teachers were instructed to evaluate the task in the last part of the questionnaire.

[1] The task was devised by the author of this thesis (Valentino Jakšić) and Jurica Korade, a colleague who used the same exercise in a research of his own.

8.5 Data analysis

The data acquired during the research was analyzed in two different modes. The analysis of the personal stances on gestures and the application of gestures in classrooms (rated on the Likert scale) was performed by calculating the average level of accordance with presented claims for all the selected teachers. The second part was analyzed by comparing evaluations of the task by all the teachers.

8.6 Results and discussion

In this section, the results of the research will be presented, followed by a discussion. The average level of accordance with presented claims is calculated and presented through numerical evaluation. Afterwards, the second part of the research is presented as a comparison of teacher's opnions.

8.6.1 General opinion on gestures

In the second part of the research, the participants rated the claims about their general opinion on gestures. The full numerical results and the average from the Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree, 2– disagree, 3 – neither agree nor disagree, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree) along with claims that were assessed in the research are presented in Table 1. However, the general scale was adjusted to better reflect the averages. Therefore, the scale is as follows: 0 to 1.49 – strongly disagree, 1.5 to 2.49 – disagree, 2.5 to 3.49 – neither agree nor disagree, 3.5 to 4.49 – agree, 4.5 to 5 – strongly agree.

Table 1. Numerical representation of general opinions on gestures

Claims	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Average
Gestures are a part of language.	5	5	5	5
I always notice when people gesture.	4	5	5	4.67
I use gestures in everyday communication.	2	5	5	4
Gestures are mostly performed subconsciously.	4	5	5	4.67
People can gesture without speaking.	3	5	5	4.33

People gesture even when they are thinking without uttering a word.	4	5	4	4.33
Gestures differ from language to language.	5	5	4	4.67
Gestures can help you when you speak with someone you cannot understand.	5	5	5	5
Gestures are helpful when learning a foreign language.	4	4	4	4
Young children can gesture before they learn to speak.	2	5	5	4
You can gesture only with your hands.	2	1	2	1.67
Gestures are used only in dialogues.	2	1	3	2
Gestures can be very complex.	3	5	4	4
Gestures can carry a lot of meaning.	4	5	5	4.67
I always understand what the gesture means.	2	3	4	3

8.6.2 Current level of the application of gestures in classrooms

In the following part of the research, the participants rated the claims about their current use of gestures in classrooms. The full numerical results and the average from the Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree, 2– disagree, 3 – neither agree nor disagree, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree) along with claims that were assessed in the research are presented in Table 2. However, the general scale was adjusted to better reflect the averages. Therefore, the scale is as follows: 0 to 1.49 – strongly disagree, 1.5 to 2.49 – disagree, 2.5 to 3.49 – neither agree nor disagree, 3.5 to 4.49 – agree, 4.5 to 5 – strongly agree.

Table 2. Numerical representation of the current usage of gestures in classrooms

Claims	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Average
I pay attention to my gestures during the class.	3	3	5	3.67

I tend to plan and include gestures in my curriculum.	1	1	4	2
I use exercises that include gestures.	1	1	3	1.67
I entice my students to pay attention to the gestures.	2	1	3	2
I tend to correct my students when they use a gesture out of context.	1	5	3	3
I explain the cultural difference between the same gestures in L1 and L2.	3	5	4	4
I thought about incorporating gestures in my class.	1	3	3	2.33
I use gestures to stimulate learning new content.	1	5	3	3

8.6.3 Task evaluation

In the last part of the research, the participants were asked to evaluate the task they have observed being done with their students. They were given a description of the exercise, followed by the description of its topic, aims, used materials and blackboard plan, and 6 questions to answer. The results are shown separately for each participant in a Q and A form.

Teacher 1

Q: What do you think about the exercise we did with your students?

A: I think that the exercise was very interesting because this is something I have never done with my students.

Q: Do you think that similar exercises would be useful?

A: Yes, I think this kind of exercise is very interesting, and, above all, useful because it entices students to pay attention to the part of communication they haven't been aware of before.

Q: What age groups would benefit the most from this approach?

A: I think that students from grades 5-8 would benefit the most from this kind of exercise.

Q: Can learning about gestures improve proficiency?

A: I really don’t know, but I think it could.

Q: Would you be open to incorporating similar exercises in your classes and why?

A: Yes, because this is an interesting activity and students could learn the differences in gestures between different languages.

Q: If you have any further comments, please feel free to write them down.

A: /

Teacher 2

Q: What do you think about the exercise we did with your students?

A: entertaining / interesting / helpful

Q: Do you think that similar exercises would be useful?

A: I definitely do. I never thought of incorporating gestures in my classes but now I realize that would be interesting and useful.

Q: What age groups would benefit the most from this approach?

A: Young learners with a little pool of words they can use in everyday English situations.

Q: Can learning about gestures improve proficiency?

A: Yes, they can.

Q: Would you be open to incorporating similar exercises in your classes and why?

A: Look at No 2

Q: If you have any further comments, please feel free to write them down.

A: At the beginning students were kind of sleepy and not really interested in the matter but at some point they started waking up because it was interesting. They realized the importance of gestures – something they were not aware of before.

Teacher 3

Q: What do you think about the exercise we did with your students?

A: It’s well thought-out and not too difficult for students. It’s the right level.

Q: Do you think that similar exercises would be useful?

A: Yes, because the body language conveys meanings and can elicit communication.

Q: What age groups would benefit the most from this approach?

A: Lower-primary students would benefit the most. It's motivational.

Q: Can learning about gestures improve proficiency?

A: It can motivate students to observe closely and (also) it can promote speaking.

Q: Would you be open to incorporating similar exercises in your classes and why?

A: I would because they seem to be useful. Students need to be aware of the importance of gestures.

Q: If you have any further comments, please feel free to write them down.

A: /

8.6.4 Discussion

The results presented support the findings from previous studies - all the participants agree that gestures can influence and promote language learning, just as previous studies have found. Furthermore, all participants agree that gestures are an integral part of language, which is something that linguists still dispute. However, this particular study differs from previous ones, as it aimed to investigate the opinion of teachers, not learners. Teachers have experience in teaching and recognizing what leads to language acquisition. They encounter and work with a multitude of learners with a variety of individual differences. Therefore, their insight is invaluable.

All participants unanimously agreed that gestures are important part of language, but also conceded that they rarely or never focus on them specifically. In general, they rarely tend to plan and include gestures in their lesson plans nor use exercises that include gestures. They also reported that they did not encourage their students to pay attention to gestures. They also admitted that they had never thought about incorporating gestures into their classes. These findings confirmed our starting hypothesis: teachers rarely (if ever) focus specifically on gestures in their classes.

However, after observing their students involved in doing an exercise that incorporated gestures, their attitude changed. The participants agreed that the activity seemed interesting for

their students, and that it was potentially very useful for them. Furthermore, they stated that this kind of exercise would be especially useful for younger and less proficient learners. Finally, all of them expressed openness to incorporating gestures in their TEFL classrooms, which confirmed the second hypothesis of this research: teachers may be willing to include gesture learning in their classes if properly educated and informed about the advantage of teaching gestures.

9 Conclusion

Gestures are an integral part of the multimodality of language, and we believe that as such should be incorporated in TEFL classrooms in order to enable learners to reach their communicative potential. Gestures represent a form of communication that existed before the spoken and written language, which is still evident in children's language development – gesturing will often manifest before any meaningful utterances. In addition to that, gestures, with their nature and their role, seem to fit into various modern approaches to SLA.

People tend to use gestures when/if they cannot explain something in their L1. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that gestures are potential tool L2 too. However, gestures do not seem to be incorporated in Croatian EFL textbooks. The authors of the textbooks may find them unnecessary and assume that learners will "learn" about gestures simply by attending classes and observing their teachers. Still, in informal conversation the author had with the learners that participated in this research, he found out that the majority of learners never paid any attention to gesturing nor thought about their role. Teachers are no different, as the results of our research have shown.

What is encouraging is the willingness of teachers to move forward and change the existing situation. They seem willing to incorporate new trends, new research findings and their own unique ideas to promote various aspects of SLA. Furthermore, they value gestures as facilitators of communication and as means for raising the level of communicative competence of their students. We believe that with proper education and encouragement to explore other modalities of language (such as gesture), teachers are likely to make their classes more interesting and conducive to learning. After all, constant improvement and change is the essence of learning, and something all teachers should strive for in order to maximize their success as educators.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. The research questionnaire

Teacher's perception of the application of gestures in TEFL classroom

By filling out this survey, I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind. I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially. I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about. I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the author's graduate thesis.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask.

Years of studying English: _____

Years of teaching English: _____

What age groups have you taught?

_____

_____

How many languages do you speak: ____

What are gestures? Please explain in your own words.

_____

_____

_____

_____

How would you rate the general language proficiency of this class?

_____

_____

1) Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with all the following statements by selecting a number from the following scale: 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3- neither agree nor disagree, 4 – agree, 5 - strongly agree.

1.	Gestures are a part of language.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I always notice when people gesture.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I use gestures in everyday communication.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Gestures are mostly performed subconsciously.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	People can gesture without speaking.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	People gesture even when they are thinking without uttering a word.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Gestures differ from language to language.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Gestures can help you when you speak with someone you cannot understand.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Gestures are helpful when learning a foreign language.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Young children can gesture before they learn to speak.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	You can gesture only with your hands.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Gestures are used only in dialogues.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	Gestures can be very complex.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	Gestures can carry a lot of meaning.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	I always understand what the gesture means.	1	2	3	4	5

2) **Please indicate how frequently you perform the following actions by selecting a number from the following scale: 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3- neither agree nor disagree, 4 – agree, 5 - strongly agree.**

1.	I pay attention to my gestures during the class.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I tend to plan and include gestures in my curriculum.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I use exercises that include gestures.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I entice my students to pay attention to the gestures.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I tend to correct my students when they use a gesture out of context.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I explain the cultural difference between the same gestures in L1 and L2.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I thought about incorporating gestures in my class.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I use gestures to stimulate learning new content.	1	2	3	4	5

Viewing exercise

This is an example of an exercise with gestures which is suitable for all age groups with minor tweaks.

Students are going to watch a short (2 minutes) video clip taken from a talk show. The sound will be muted so you they cannot hear what is being spoken. Their task is to carefully observe the speakers and try to spot as many different gestures as possible and figure out the possible meaning they might have.

After the first viewing, they will watch the video clip again, but this time also try to observe the body language and posture of each speaker, i.e. are they relaxed, tense, commanding, authoritative, pleading, passive...

They do not have to write anything, simply observe.

- **TOPIC: Gestures in communication**
- **AIMS:**
  a) *linguistic* – intruduction to multimodality
  b) *communicative* – developing deeper understanding by recognizing gestures
  c) *educational* – learning how to use body language; culture specific gestures
- **MATERIALS USED: PC/laptop, projector/smartboard**
- **BLACKBOARD PLAN: no use, unless something needs to be specifically explained**

DISCLAIMER – this exercise plan and part of the instrument was devised in collaboration with Jurica Korade.

3) Please answer the questions in a few sentences.

1. What do you think about the exercise we did with your students?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Do you think that similar exercises would be useful?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. What age groups would benefit the most from this approach?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Can learning about gestures improve proficiency?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. Would you be open to incorporating similar exercises in your classes and why?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

6. If you have any further comments, please feel free to write them down.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you!