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978-1-107-04111-0 - Narrative Development in Young Children: Gesture, Imagery, and Cohesion

Elena T. Levy and David McNeill

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Narrative Development in Young Children

As children begin to use language in early childhood, they produce increasingly large units of coherent speech, including narrative descriptions of events. This book examines the process of narrative development in young children, focusing on the development of “cohesion” – the use of *speech and gesture* to create coherent perspectives on events. Surveying early narrative development in which gesture plays an integral part, the book explores the development of cohesive, clause-linking devices during the period from age two to three. Illustrated with longitudinal case studies, the book examines the crib-talk of two-year-old Emily and compares it to the discourse patterns of storybooks and nursery rhymes, and to her father’s pre-bedtime routines. In a second case study, the authors trace the changing relationships between speech and gesture in the spontaneous narratives of two-year-old Ella. This book will be invaluable to students and researchers in language acquisition, developmental psychology, and gesture studies.

ELENA T. LEVY is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Connecticut. Her publications on narrative discourse include studies of typically developing children and adults, as well as individuals with autistic spectrum disorders. She is co-editor, with Susan D. Duncan and Justine Cassell, of *Gesture and the Dynamic Dimension of Language* (2007).

DAVID MCNEILL is Professor Emeritus in the Departments of Psychology and Linguistics at the University of Chicago. His publications include a “trilogy” of gesture books, *Hand and Mind* (1992), *Gesture and Thought* (2005), and *How Language Began: Gesture and Speech in Human Evolution* (2012), plus an edited volume, *Language and Gesture* (2000).

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*For my parents,
Harry Levy and Hilda Jonas Levy,
for passing on to me their love of language
– ETL*

*David McNeill dedicates the book to Nobuko,
his lucky charm*

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Preface

This book is a joint effort. It grew entirely from our collaboration. And it is not our first collaboration by any means. Indeed, the first publication on the gesture topic for either of us was a joint effort (McNeill and Levy, 1982). We joined forces on other papers as well, two of which had cohesion, a theme of this book, as the topic (Levy and McNeill, 1992; McNeill and Levy, 1993). The book is a bookend of what has been, for both of us, a wonderful career of studying a field new to science, the *gesture–speech unity* of the human condition, and now how it develops in young children. We will not summarize our observations and arguments in this Preface – they will appear soon enough; but we realize that we are advancing views that, apart from our guides, Werner and Kaplan (1963), have been largely overlooked. Efforts of this kind are a matter of going out on a limb. The view, however, is splendid, there is plenty of room, and we invite the reader to climb out with us. Our collaboration began when one of us (ETL) saw that a chapter in a book the other had written (McNeill, 2012) could be enlarged in two important directions. The first was to enrich the *growth point* theory of that book, joining it to the important, but (for historical reasons) often neglected work of Werner and Kaplan. We adopt their concept of symbol formation as an overarching concept of language development and add the topic of McNeill’s chapter, the child’s development of *dual semiosis*. The second direction was the equally rich idea that the development of language is, in many respects, a story of how thought grows in coherence, the impact of this genesis on language, then the impact of language back on thought. These ideas, plus the theme of gesture–speech unity from the 2012 book, form what we see now as a triangle of concepts, and this triangle we have formed here.

ETL AND DMCN

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David McNeill takes this opportunity to thank four beyond thanking who have had a great influence on him. To absorb their ideas while dodging their conflicts has long been a guide: Peirce, Saussure, Vygotsky, and Merleau-Ponty.