Thinking-for-speaking to describe motion in L2 Japanese: L1 and L2 speech and gesture

Noriko Iwasaki¹, Keiko Yoshioka²

¹SOAS, University of London, United Kingdom
²Leiden University, Netherlands

Learning an L2 involves learning another way of "thinking for speaking" (Slobin, 1996). Talmy’s (2000) typological framework of motion event representation is used to examine different ways of thinking-for-speaking across languages and to examine L2 learners’ restructuring of thinking-for-speaking. Studies compare L2 learners’ motion event construal with that of target language monolinguals in speech and gesture (e.g. Brown, 2015; Stam 2015). An important question addressed is how and to what extent adult L2 learners restructure their thinking-for-speaking in an L2 that is typologically different from their L1, and the results are often mixed (e.g. Cadierno, 2008). Learners are found to restructure the encoding of Path of motion more easily than Manner of motion; Negueruela, et al. (2004) found that restructuring L1 patterns for L2 was more difficult when English (S-language) speakers learned L2 Spanish (V-language) than vice-versa. Importantly, L2 learners’ co-speech gesturing is more revealing of L1 thinking-for-speaking patterns than their L2 speech (e.g. Stam 2006).

The current study examines L1 and L2 speech and gesture among 13 English-speaking (S-language) learners of L2 Japanese (V-language), focusing on the most salient differences between S-language and V-language speakers noted by Kita and Özyürek (2003). They showed that gesture-speech coordination reflected the interaction of typologically varied linguistic encoding options and spatial representations generated online. Namely, tight syntactic packaging of Manner and Path in S-language (e.g. ‘roll down’) co-occurs with gesture conflating Manner and Path (e.g. rotating hand moving downward); availability of the verb ‘swing’ in English leads to arc-shaped gesture. It was found that the learners tended not to use gestures conflating Manner and Path not only in L2 but also in L1 even when speech is tightly packaged. In contrast, they used arc-shaped gestures primarily in L1 English. We discuss the findings in terms of “thinking-for-speaking” and factors associated with L2 acquisition.

Keywords: Thinking-for-speaking, motion event, Japanese as L2, gesture.