How do speakers think for speaking in a VOS language?

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Abstract

Recent studies on gestural production have suggested that the natural order of event description is SOV irrespective of one’s native language (Goldin-Meadow et al., 2008). However, the types of tested languages are typologically quite limited. This study conducted gestural production task in Kaqchikel (VOS) and found that gestural production is partially correlated with word order. Though Actor-Patient order seems to be the natural order of event description even in a VOS language, Thinking for Speaking Hypothesis (Slobin, 1996) is at least partially supported by our results.

1. Introduction: Does language correlate with nonlinguistic behavior?

Prior studies: NO, there is a natural order of event description [1,2,3].

Goldin-Meadow et al. (2008) [1]

• Participants describe simple transitive events using gestures without speech.
• Dominant gesture is SOV (Actor-Patient-Action) irrespective of their native language (e.g., English/Spanish/Chinese (SVO), Turkish (SOV)).
  ① Entities (actor and patient) are cognitively more basic and less relational than action, S, O before V.
  ② Action is more tightly connected to patient than action, O is put closer to verb than S.

2. Research Questions

- To what extent can we say that SOV is a natural order of gestural event description?
- Do properties of VOS languages correlate with nonlinguistic behavior?

3. Predictions

- If gestural order reflects the natural order of event description universally, S(O)V ordering should be dominantly produced in gesture even in a OS language.
- If entities are universally more basic and salient than action, VOS speakers should also produce Subject and Object prior to Verb in gesture event description.

4. Experiments

Target language: Kaqchikel
- A Mayan language spoken in Guatemala.
- Canonical word order: VOS [1]

Control language: Japanese
- An SOV language, Japanese, was used as a control.

Results

Kaqchikel and Japanese speakers showed diverse patterns for their gestural production ($\chi^2(3) = 32.103$, p.<0.01).

- Kaqchikel speakers produced SOV and SVO gestures equally.
- A control group of Japanese speakers predominantly produced SOV gestures (natural order of event description).

References

Acknowledgments: The authors thank Yoshio Wesp, Lindsay P. Garcia, João E. A. Silva, Filiber P. Matus, and for their support for conducting experiments in Guatemala, and other project members for their valuable comments. This research was supported by Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (S) K2220001 (Ph. Masatoshi Koizumi).

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