

**Gesturing Through Time:
Holds and Intermodal Timing in the Stream of Speech**

by

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Abstract

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Most previous work examining co-speech gestures (the spontaneous bodily movements and configurations we engage in during speaking) has emphasized the importance of their most salient or energetically expressive moments, known as gesture ‘strokes’ (Kendon 1980). In contrast, in this dissertation I explore the potential functions of intervals of gestural *stasis*, or gesture ‘holds’, in which the hands or body maintain particular configurations across variable spans of time, interwoven with the stream of speech. Through the embodiment of a constant form within continuously evolving face-to-face interactions, holds make possible a unique and understudied array of functions relating to the maintenance of ideas and contexts across time.

Chapter 1 introduces the corpus of videotaped dyadic conversations from which all of the examples are drawn, discusses the history of the concepts of ‘stroke’ and ‘hold’, and illustrates the structural possibilities for the timing of holds with respect to co-expressive speech: they bear content that is not just simultaneous with, but also ‘retrospective’ and/or ‘prospective’ of, portions of the full composite utterances in which they occur.

Chapter 2 illustrates that holds lasting across pauses and disfluencies support continued expressiveness and interpretability, alternately presaging new content that will also be part of a fluent resumption, or maintaining retrospective links to prior content that can contextualize the resumption.

Chapter 3 discusses the frequent expressive complementarity of co-timed speech and gesture, as it relates to the debate on speech-gesture synchrony, and further demonstrates that preliminary commitments to utterances are often partially *fulfilled* from the earliest

moments because of gestural cues that are interpretable at all points of their lifecycles, including preparatory phases.

Chapter 4 discusses the implications for attention and memory of gesture holds acting as temporary cognitive artifacts, forming ‘bridges’ across interruptions and competing representations by interlocutors, thereby functioning retrospectively as ‘recall cues’ to previous moments of the interaction.

Chapter 5 focuses on instances of gesture holds combined with listener-directed gaze that are maintained across turn transitions, then released, allowing speakers to ‘hand off’ control while enforcing a context for the next turn.

Chapter 6 synthesizes the preceding chapters and suggests directions for future research.

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