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Authors

Ceylan, S leyman Can
...zer, Demet
G ksun, Tilbe

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The Role of Gesture in Emotion Communication: Patterns Across Emotional Categories and Stimulus Types

Süleyman Can Ceylan

Koç University, Istanbul, Turkey

Demet Özer

Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey

Tilbe Göksun

Koç University, Istanbul, Turkey

Abstract

Abstract Gestures are crucial cues in emotion communication, yet little is known about how specific emotions elicited through different stimuli link to gesture production. The present study investigated how gesture frequency and type (representational vs. nonrepresentational) varied across specific emotion categories (i.e., happiness, anger, sadness, and neutral) elicited by visual stimuli and written narratives. In a within-subject design, participants (n=38) retold emotionally charged movie clips and written narratives for each emotion. The results showed that the participants overall produced fewer representational gestures while describing sadness compared to happiness and neutral, and anger compared to neutral. Interestingly, the participants overall produced more nonrepresentational gestures in narrative descriptions than in movie clip descriptions. However, gesture frequency and type did not significantly differ across movie clips and narratives. These results underscore the importance of accounting for both stimulus type and specific emotion categories when examining the role of gestures in emotion communication.