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Vague Reference in Speech and Gesture: L2 vs L1

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Abstract. The study explores the notion construal in speech and in gesture in expository monologues in the second language (English) contrasted with the native language (Russian). The results display similar distribution in vague reference in speech and in gesture, which overall evidence in favour of common discourse patterns of multimodal construal. However, the prevalence of placeholders aligned with representational gestures in the second language attests to the higher role of lexical search to construe vague notions aided with the use of gestures.

Keywords: second language, native language, vague reference, speech, gesture, expository discourse

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Научная статья

Нечеткая референция в речи и жесте: изучаемый и родной языки

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Аннотация. На материале экспозиторных монологов сравниваются особенности конструирования понятий в речи и жестах в изучаемом языке (английском) и в родном языке (русском). Результаты обнаруживают сходство в распределении языковых средств нечеткой референции и разных типов жестов, что подтверждает наличие общих дискурсивных паттернов полимодального конструирования понятий. Однако превалирование в изучаемом языке заместителей, сопровождающихся репрезентирующими жестами, указывает на проблему лексического поиска, в решении которой принимают участие жесты.

Ключевые слова: изучаемый язык, родной язык, нечеткая референция, речь, жест, экспозиторный дискурс

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INTRODUCTION

While vague reference is extensively explored in speech, both within Russian [Подлесская, 2013] and English languages [Channell, 1983], where the distinctions of placeholders and approximators are mostly observed, the multimodal nature of vague reference has not received much attention. However, reference and reification are vastly multimodal phenomena which presumes that different communicative modes interact in their construal. In [Iriskhanova et al., 2023], vague reference was experimentally attested in speech and gesture in expository discourse, applying four functional gesture types – deictic, representational, pragmatic and adaptors, and the study revealed significant distinctions in their co-occurrences; still the research was conducted in application to the native language (Russian). Following the postulates expressed in second language multimodal studies ([Gullberg, 2005; Gregersen et al., 2009; Lin, 2019], among the others), we presume that the distribution of speech and gesture in vague reference in L1 and L2 (even with advanced learners) will display differences, specifically due to the distinctions in language structure, in language proficiency in L1 and L2, in discourse construal patterns.

To identify the differences, we conducted a multimodal experiment with second language (English) advanced learners who were engaged in the same task of explaining the differences between the notions as the native language speakers [Iriskhanova et al., 2023]; the same types of vague reference in speech and gestures were applied in the same discourse type. Further contrastive statistical analysis was adopted to identify the differences. Therefore, the aim of study is to disclose the regularities in the speech and gesture distribution in vague reference in second language (English) as contrasted with the native language (Russian). Consequently, the article develops a contrastive L2 vs L1 perspective of multimodal discourse, here expository discourse with a special focus on vague reference phenomenon. The contributions of the current study include (i) establishing the regularities in speech and co-speech gesture distribution in vague reference construal in the compiled corpus of L2 expository discourse; (ii) specifying the differences in the multimodal regularity patterns in L2 and L1. The work is structured as follows. In Theoretical Framework section, we present the methodological outcomes featuring the differences in multimodal behavior in L1 and L2 and also featuring multimodal vague reference studies in L1: following these studies we formulate the hypotheses of the current study dealing with the use of multimodal behavior in vague reference construal in L2. In Data and methods section, we present the experiment design and data processing algorithm. In Results and Discussion section, we submit the data on placeholders and approximators distribution with four gesture types in L2 as contrasted with the data in L1. In Final remarks, we formulate the major outcomes of the study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Second language multimodal studies, although a new research area, have established the distinctions in the use of speech and gesture in L2 vs L1 which stem from the differences in 1) language structure, 2) the level of proficiency in L2, 3) discourse construal patterns. We will consider them below.

A large body of studies exemplifies the distinctions in multimodal behavior which arise in verb-framed and satellite-framed languages, which are in our case Russian and English. As known, in Russian as a verb-framed language, the manner and the path of motion is encoded in the verb itself, e.g. *выбежал*, *перескочил*, *дополз*, while in English as a satellite-framed language the path of motion is encoded in the satellite prepositions in the post-position to the verb in the corresponding units *ran out of*, *jumped over*, *crawled over to*. This difference is shown to produce different effects on the use of gestures synchronized with the verb component or satellite component, with more path indicating gestures appearing with satellite component [Negueruela et al., 2004; Stam, 2006; Gullberg, 2008]. Since in this study the described difference in language structure may affect the increasing number of path indicating gestures, which may be deictic and representational, this probability should be considered. Additionally, there may be differences in the use of vague reference cues in Russian and English, which accounts for the distinctions in deadjectival nominalization processes in the contrasted languages. In the case of conversion, a decision is to be adopted whether we deal with adjectives or deadjectival nominalizations. To identify whether an adjective is nominalized (e.g., in *good*, *strange* and in *хорошее*, *странное*), we address both its lexical meaning and syntactic role since both approaches are applied in grammar studies in English; however, cognitive and functional criteria also help [Lieber, 2016] since they allow to determine the category (attribute or object) the word manifests. In English deadjectival nominalization is additionally marked lexically with definite article and indefinite pronoun appearing in pre- or post-position and in Russian only the syntactic role is considered since no additional lexical cues are used. However, due to the fact that we annotate spoken discourse

which does not always follow the rigid syntactic structure, allows for article omissions, repetitions and self-corrections, etc., and to adopt a decision on the grounds of cognitive and functional criteria is not always possible, we may well expect that the number of nominalized adjectives as placeholders might be higher in Russian since they are only syntactically bound.

The level of proficiency in L2 is reported in the studies to affect the gestural behavior in L2. Gregersen et al (2019) claim that advanced learners use significantly more speech-related, meaning-enhancing gestures than beginners, which means that by enrolling for the experiment only advanced learners we may well expect that their gestural activity in L2 should not be lower than in L1. However, Gullberg (2008) claims that advanced learners have acquired the L2 conceptualization and their gestures will consequently look like L2, which means that there must still be differences in gesturing in L1 and L2 due to different notion conceptualization. Importantly, the same study observes that there might be differences in both modalities simultaneously or only in one. Additionally, the studies claim that advanced L2 learners tend to produce more beats, deictic and iconic (representational and pragmatic) gestures in L2 than in L1 [Lin, 2019], which means the gesture activity might display differences in the use of particular gestures.

Different discourse construal patterns in L1 and L2 also attribute to different gesturing in expository discourse which presupposes the construal of notions via their representation, explication, and reconstruction [Малахова, 2022]. According to Information Packaging Hypothesis [Alibali et al., 2017], gestures facilitate speaking because they arise from different mechanisms, spatio-motoric thinking with gesture and analytic thinking in speech. Still, other potent views on the role of gesture in speech production (Lexical Retrieval Hypothesis and Image Activation Hypothesis) also claim that gestures help speakers to retrieve lexical items from mental lexicon and serve to maintain activation of mental images as they are encoded in speech. Therefore, presumably, in L2 gestural activity should be higher, especially due to the fact that L2 learners use gestures for "strategically three different purposes: to compensate for lexical shortcomings in explaining the notions, to alleviate grammatical difficulties, and to manage fluency-related problems" [Gullberg, 2008, p. 288]. This view is concomitant with experimental studies which show that bilinguals use more gestures in L2 than in L1 [Nagpal et al., 2011] or that L2 learners employ more lexical search in speech and consequently more gestures [Hadar et al., 2001]. Importantly, gestures happen to complement speech in conveying information about poorly mastered notions [Goldin-Meadow, 2003], which might occur in case of explaining the difference in synonymic notions in L2 in expository discourse.

Taking these views further, we presume that the distribution of speech and gesture in vague reference in a second language (even with advanced learners) will display considerable differences in explaining the notions, specifically due to more lexical search in L2, more gesturing in L2 and more complementary gesturing in L2, specifically in terms of deictic and representational gesture.

DATA AND METHODS

34 participants (all students, aged 18–25) took part in the experiment[1]. All the participants signed a consent claiming that they agree to take part in the experiment and to be videorecorded for further analysis of their multimodal behavior. In the experiment, the mentors were seated in front of the participant and presented 5 questions asking to comment on the difference between the close synonyms *fire*

[1]The authors are grateful to the students of Translation Department at Moscow State Linguistic University who helped to compile the corpus and participated in the experiment.

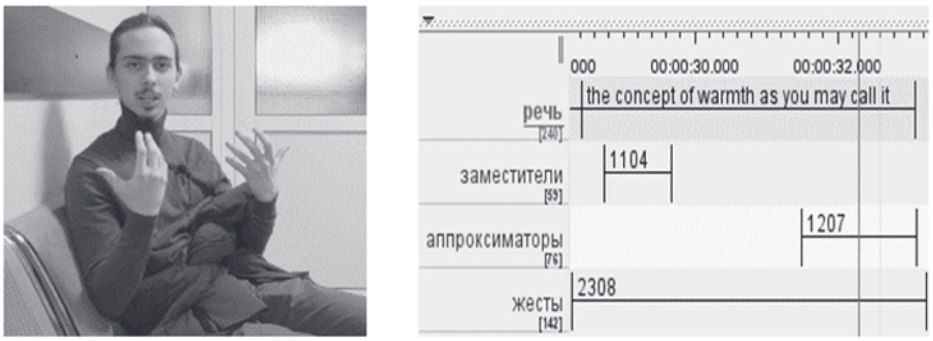

Fig. 1. Sample 1 annotation

and *flame*, *fight* and *battle*, *lie* and *deceit*, *ideal* and *perfection*, *fear* and *terror* (the same as in L1). The participants' responses were not limited in time. The recorded corpus of speech and gesture manifestations is 2 hours 34 minutes 1 sec long. The data were then subjected to analysis in ELAN software, where they were annotated in three layers: transcriptions, vague reference markers, and gesture types (Fig. 1).

In the first layer, speech was segmented into units equal to clause. In the second and third layers the placeholders and approximators were identified. In the fourth layer gestures were annotated using the typology of its sub-categories (see below). The annotation units were timelined so that the synchronization between vague reference speech cues and gestures could be established. In Figure 1 the speaker is using a pragmatic gesture (marked 2308) both with an approximator 1207 (metadiscursive comments) in *as you may call it* and a placeholder 1104 (shell-nouns) in *concept* (1104).

To develop the annotation system for vague reference cues in speech, we addressed the vague reference typologies developed for the Russian language and also for the English language, mostly in terms of approximators. Still, the system had to be adjusted to the discourse type (exposition) which the experiment participants employed. All vague reference cues were divided into two major categories: placeholders and approximators, which included six sub-categories each, with assigned codes. Placeholders involved 1) expressions or tropes used to present objects, characteristics, events etc., in deceit is *the* ***mother*** *of lie, there're terrorists, but there're no* ***fearorrists*** (1102), 2) indefinite pronouns and adverbs, such as *someone*, *something*, *somebody* (1103), 3) shell-nouns, such as word, *situation*, *aspect*, *thing*, *object* (1104), 4) finalizing expressions such as *and so on* (1105), 5) nominalized adjectives like *the beautiful* (1106); 6) expressions of generalization, such as *something like that*, *and that's all* (1107). Approximators involved 1) hedging expressions used to reduce accuracy, such as *for example*, *in general*, *like* (1202), 2) hedging expressions used to express subjectiveness of a statement, such as to my mind, for me, in my opinion, I reckon (1203), 3) indefinite pronouns like *some* (1204), 4) modal verbs, adverbs expressing possibility and probability, such as *maybe*, *may be*, *could be*, *might* (1205), 5) demonstrative pronouns, such as this, these, that, those (1206), 6) metadiscursive comments, *such as so to say*, *how can I say this*, *you know*, *as I've said* (1207).

While classifying the vague reference cues in speech we faced the problem of drawing a distinction between the discourse markers displaying and not displaying vague reference. The analysis revealed following frequently occurring types of such cues: 1) verbs *can* and *may* used either in their modal meaning or as uncertainty expressions (1205): *Fire is used for everything that is burning*, *it* ***can be*** *a campfire or a fire in an oven* (indication of different possible features) // *Fire* ***can be*** *wider than flame* (indication of the speaker's uncertainty, 1205); *Perfection* ***may be*** *different for different people* (indication of the possibility of a certain situation) // *Ideal is something that is* ***maybe*** *even above our human understanding* (indication of uncertainty, 1205). 2) words used either as conjunctions or as hedging expressions (1202): *Word "flame" I've been hearing in phrases* ***like*** *"Go up in flames"* (conjunction) // *Deceit doesn't necessarily mean, uh,* ***like****, an exceptionally bad thing* (hedging expression, 1202). 3) words like that used either as conjunctions or as demonstrative pronouns (1206): *It's just predetermined* ***that*** *we will never get there in the end* (a subjunction linking the main and the subordinate clause) // *Fear, uh,* ***that*** *to me is connected with something deep within ourselves* (a pronoun used instead of the substituted word, 1206).

To annotate the gesture types, we applied the typology developed and used in [Iriskhanova et al., 2023]. Therefore, we identified four basic gesture types: deictic, representational, pragmatic and adaptors; still, similarly to the L1 experiment, to define the gesture type, we also addressed their sub-types with deictic gestures being categorized as pointing and touching gestures; representational ones as holding, molding, acting, embodying and tracing gestures; pragmatic as discourse structuring, discourse representational, discourse emphatic, expressing attitude / evaluation, contact establishing gestures; and adaptors as self-adaptors and object-adaptors.

In Fig. 2 and 3 we present the annotation examples.

Figures 2 and 3 manifest the co-occurrences of vague reference cues and functional gestures in explaining the notions *perfection* and *fire*. As seen, the use of a vague reference cue synchronized with a gesture is considered. Figure 2 displays the use of approximator *I think* (coded as 1203) synchronized with a deictic gesture (coded as 2104). In Figure 3 the speech contains one placeholder process *of burning* (coded as 1104) which is synchronized with a representational gesture (coded as 2206). The data processing algorithm included 5 steps, with four steps taken from [Iriskhanova et al., 2023], and the fifth added step to provide contrastive analysis.

Step 1. Analysis of frequency of two functional types of speech cues, placeholders and approximators with their further distinctions; and of four gesture types. This step allowed to identify the proportional regularity of co-speech gesture use.

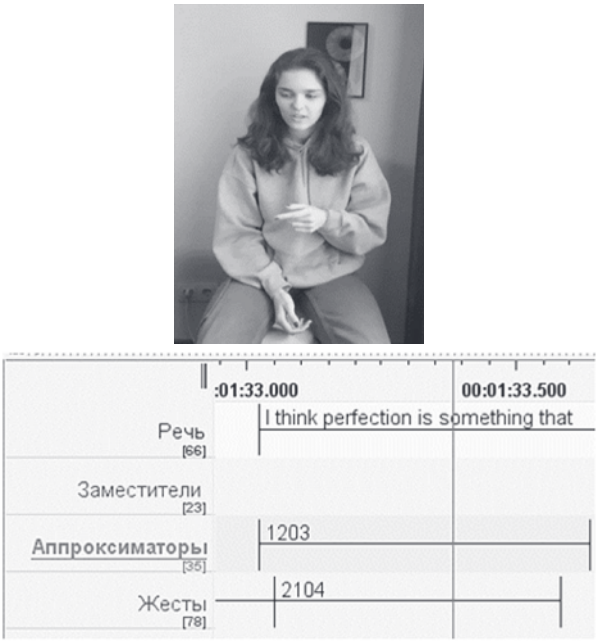

Fig. 2. Sample 2 annotation

Fig. 3. Sample 3 annotation

Step 2. Contingency tests with vague reference cues and gestures. At this step, we determined whether there are specific gestures contingent with either type of speech cues.

Step 3. Analyses of variance in speech and gesture in individual participants' behavior. These analyses allow to qualify the differences as systemic or individual.

Step 4. Identification of the regularities in speech and gesture distribution and co-occurrence within the sample and in the individual behavior.

Step 5. Contrastive analysis of speech and gesture regularities in L2 and L1. To perform, we conduct a series of Chi-square tests identifying significant differences in the use of regularities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To establish the regularities in speech and co-speech gesture distribution in vague reference construal in the compiled corpus of L2 expository discourse, we first perform frequency analysis of 1) two functional types of speech cues: placeholders and approximators with further distinctions; 2) four gesture types.

In Figures 4a and 4b the distribution of speech cues in the speech of 34 experiment participants is shown.

As it can be seen, among placeholders the highest frequency is observed with impersonal pronouns (M = 9.21) and shell-nouns (M = 9.15), while

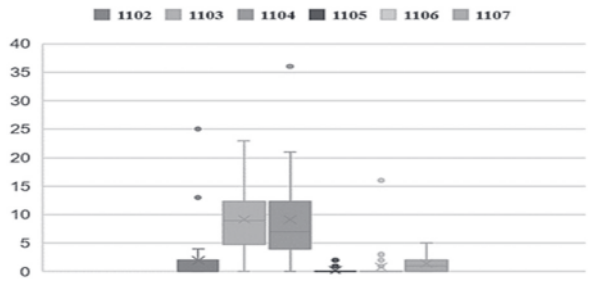

Fig. 4a. Placeholders in L2

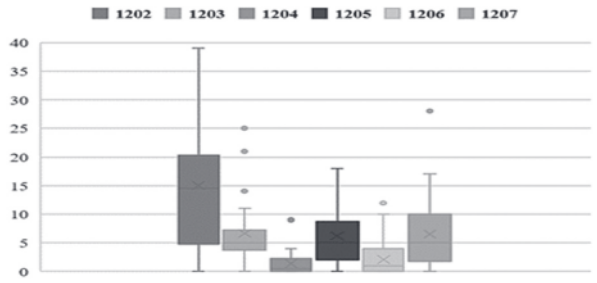

Fig. 4b. Placeholders in L2

among approximators very high frequency is found with hedges which make the statement sound less categorical (M = 15). ANOVA tests, although showed high individual variance in the use of approximators ($F(33, 5) = 69.6$ at $p < .001$), whereas in the use of placeholders the variance was almost insignificant ($F(33, 5) = 47.7$ at $p = 0.047$). The results suffice to claim that L2 speakers tend to be univocally

using placeholders, which means that this is their distribution that can serve as a benchmark for specific use of vague reference in L2.

In terms of gestures, the highest frequency is observed with pragmatic gestures (N = 1118, M = 32.88) and representational gestures (N = 669, M = 19.68), while deictic gestures (N = 307, M = 9.03) and adapters (N = 494, M = 14.53) are used comparatively more rarely. Meanwhile, ANOVA test reveals significant variance in their individual use ($F(33, 3) = 66.6$ at $p < .001$); which indicates that gesture distribution is largely maintained by individual factor than by L2 competence.

Next, 4 contingency tests with placeholders and approximators and the gesture types were performed. The tests reveal that there is a difference in the use of representational gestures with placeholders and approximators (with $\chi^2 = 15.861$ at $p < .001$) and the use of adapters with placeholders and approximators (with $\chi^2 = 17.788$ at $p < .001$). The results show that these two gesture groups can mark the distinctions between placeholders and approximators at least in L2, with representational gestures more frequently used with placeholders, and adapters with approximators. This means that representational gestures help construe the object of reference (its shape, size, peculiar features) when an L2 speaker cannot find a suitable word corresponding to it and uses a placeholder. And similarly, while using adapters, L2 speakers take pains (as adapters mostly relate to searching for construal patters) in paving the construal path towards the object of reference since these are approximators which are responsive for it.

At the next step, we perform contrastive analysis of speech and gesture regularities in L2 and L1. With the results specified in [Iriskhanova et al., 2023] obtained with 19 speakers (our corpus was obtained with 34 speakers, however not all the synonym pairs were discussed) but on the corpus of similar size (L1 corpus is 2 hours 38 minutes long and L2 corpus is 2 hours 34 minutes 1 sec long), we conduct a series of Chi-square tests identifying the differences in the use of regularities. First, we observe a significant difference in the use of placeholders and approximators in L1 and L2, with placeholders N = 768 and 774 and approximators N=1760 and 1284. With $\chi^2 = 26.568$ at $p < .001$, we maintain that while in both L1 and L2 approximators prevail over placeholders, placeholders are comparatively more often used in L2, which means that expository search in L2 (even with advanced students) is more frequently resolved at lexical level and in L1 the search is mostly performed within a situational frame. The obtained results do attest to our hypothesis claiming that the number of placeholders might be higher in Russian (mostly with nominalized adjectives) since they are only syntactically bound; this suffices to certify that L2 factor is more potent here than language factor.

Next, we contrast the use of gesture. In Figure 5 we present the contrastive distribution of gesture types in L1 and L2.

Chi-square tests revealed significant differences in the use of all gesture types (with $\chi^2 = 36.468$, 97.927, 111.335, 525.426, respectively, at $p < .001$). The results support the view expressed in [Lin, 2019] that L2 learners use more deictic and representational alongside with pragmatic (iconic in [ibid.]) gestures. However, if we consider the tantamount gesture activity in L1 and L2, we do not find that this activity is higher in L2 as declared in [Gullberg, 2008; Nagpal et al., 2011]. A possible reason explaining the inconsistency of results may be that in the current study we estimated the use of adapters as well as deictic and iconic gestures. If we do not consider these, we can claim that expository search is more frequently accompanied with gesture in L2, which

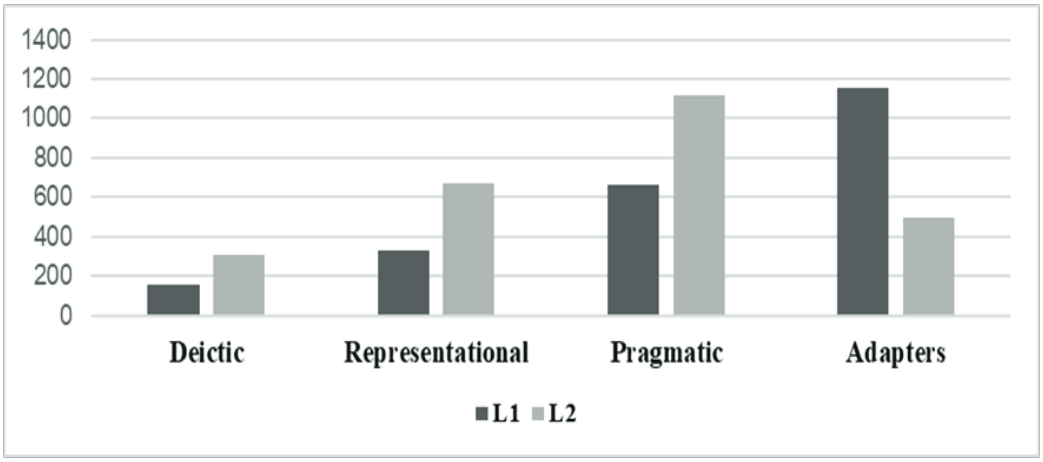

Fig. 5. Gesture distribution in L1 and L2

is consistent with aforementioned works. The study also specifies the results obtained in [Hadar et al., 2001; Goldin-Meadow, 2003] who claim that in L2 there will be more lexical search for poorly studied notions which is expressed in gesture. We observe that while gestural activity is actually higher in L2 (if we do not consider adapters), this redistribution is mostly attributed to the increase in the number of placeholders in L2 responsive for lexical search.

Finally, we contrast the distribution of gesture types with placeholders and approximators in L1 and L2. Having performed the chi-square tests (adapters are not taken into account), we find significant differences in the use of deictic gestures (χ^2 = 7.323 at p = 0.007) and very high differences in the use of representational gestures (χ^2 = 62.827 at p <.001). The results indicate that while in L1 representational gestures are mostly used with approximators, in L2 they are more often used with placeholders as seen in Figures 6 and 7.

In Figure 6, in explaining the notion *ideal*, a representational gesture is used with a placeholder 1102 (expressions or tropes used to present objects, characteristics, events), here *object without any downsides*; and in Figure 7 the same gesture type is used with a placeholder 1104 (shell-nouns, such as word, situation, aspect, thing, object), here *state* in explaining the difference between the notions *fear* and *terror*. The fact that in L2 representational gestures are more often (than in L1) used with placeholders means that 1) these gestures are highly polysemous in terms of representing both the objects of reference (in L2) and the path to the object (in L1), 2) the alignment value of representational gestures with placeholders and approximators may serve as a threshold point or a prognostic factor of differentiating L1 and L2 multimodal behavior. These observations contribute to the significance and novelty of the results obtained in the current study since it specifies the important distinction which can be adopted to attest to the way multimodal thinking is performed in L1 and L2.

FINAL REMARKS

The results of experimental research examining multimodal behavior in explaining vague reference notions in L2, complemented by contrastive L1 and L2 analysis showed several regularities typical of each group. While in both L1 and L2 approximators largely prevail over placeholders, L2 speakers tend to use significantly more placeholders, which means that the construal of object of reference with this group requires more cognitive effort than the construal of path to this object which would have been represented in the use of approximators. In gesture, the cognitive effort in object of reference construal is alleviated by the use of representational gestures which most obviously help outline its shape, size, peculiar features. Overall, while we observe a significantly higher gesture activity in L2 (if we do

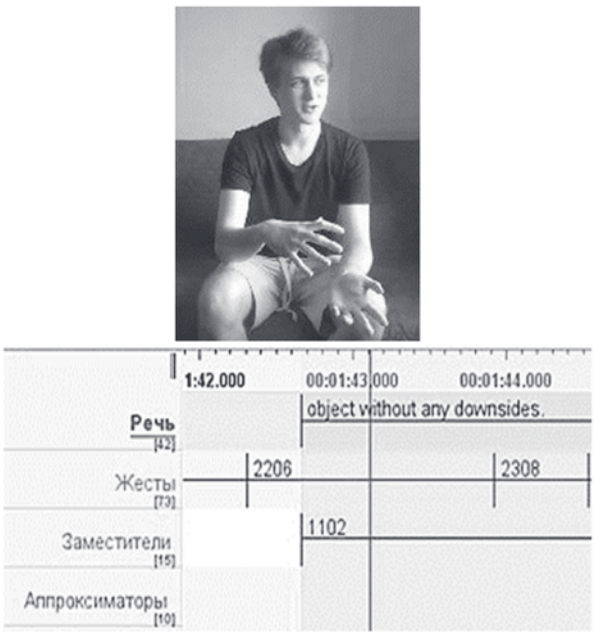

Fig. 6. Sample 4 annotation

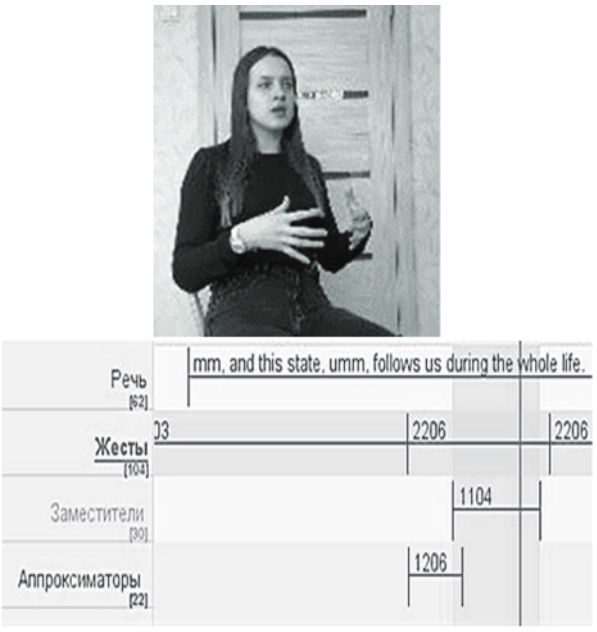

Fig. 7. Sample 5 annotation

not consider adapters), the distribution pattern of three gesture types, deictic, representational and pragmatic, is vastly similar in L1 and L2, which alongside with similar distribution of placeholders and approximators in speech maintains the potency of discourse dependent construal (since multimodal behavior displays similarity in L1 and L2). However, since in L2 we observe a specific redistribution of placeholders with representational gestures, this fact evidences in favour of higher lexical search in L2; however, to solve this problem, the speakers use representational gestures which simulate the features of notions as objects of reference. Featuring these results, the current study aimed at contrasting the distribution of speech and gesture in vague reference in L1 and L2 contributes to second language multimodal studies in the way that it specifies the speech and gesture distinctions in notion construal potentially modulated mostly by language proficiency in L1 and L2, and discourse construal patterns.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Maria I. Kiose: research methodology, research management, preparing the final draft of the paper; Alyona Zyryanova: collecting and annotating research data, preparing the classification of speech cues; Maria Karkhut: collecting and annotating research data, preparing the sample video fragments for the paper, Boris Kuznetsov: collecting and annotating research data, managing the speech annotation research; Daria Novoselova: collecting and annotating research data, research data presentation in the paper; Fedor Shumanskiy: collecting and annotating research data, managing the gesture annotation research.

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