



On the diachronic aspect of gestural communication

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Academic editor: Olga Iriskhanova ♦ Received 25 June 2021 ♦ Accepted 16 August 2021 ♦ Published 25 October 2021

Abstract

Modern studies of gesturing conclusively prove that a gestural communication system accompanies oral speech the units of which, like linguistic ones, can be described using a limited set of reproducible features assigned to certain classes and correlated with certain contexts of use.

The diachronic aspect of gesturing has been little studied, although there is an understanding that human gesture behaviour, like speech, changes in space, time as well as under the influence of changing sociocultural conditions. Changes in the gestural system usually refer to innovations, the emergence of new gestures. It is much more difficult to describe the gestures that have gone or are going out of use since due to the lack of video recording they have to be restored from descriptions preserved in literature.

Examples of gestures that have recently entered the Russian gestural system as well as examples of gestures that have gradually become obsolete are considered in this work. The data of the Multimodal Russian Corpus and some other corpora within the Russian National Corpus (RNC) used in this survey enable a clarification of the semantic and pragmatic characteristics of the gestures and changes in their use to be tracked.

Key Words

non-verbal communication, gestural linguistics, iconic and metaphoric gestures, Multimodal Russian Corpus (MURCO), changes in the system of Russian gestures

Introduction

Modern research on gesticulation convincingly proves that spoken speech and the accompanying gestures form a single, unified system (Kendon 1980, Kendon 1988, McNeill 1992, Kelly et al. 2010, Goldin-Meadow & Brentari 2017, Müller et al. 2013).

As studies from recent decades show, the units of the gestural system, like language units, can be described using a limited set of reproducible features. The traditional approach adopted in gestural linguistics finds the classifications of gestures on the following features: hand shape, orientation of the palm, movement direction and manner of the gesture stroke, location in gesture space [McNeill 1992, Bressemer et al. 2013, etc.]. A fundamentally different approach to describing the form of gestures has also been proposed. Dominique Boutet has developed a kine-

biological system of description combining the shape and function of the upper limb—the location of each segment (arm, forearm, hand and finger) and 4 types of movement: extension vs. flexion, abduction vs. adduction, rotation, pronation vs. supination (Boutet 2008, Boutet 2010, Boutet 2017, Boutet et al. 2018). This approach helps to more accurately identify different gestures and to describe the differences between gestures of similar shape.

The units of the gestural system are categorised into certain classes. Despite the fact that there is no single generally accepted classification of gestures (see the review by Kendon 2004, Goldin-Meadow & Brentari 2017), there are contradistinctions that are successfully used in the practice of studying gestures (Ekman & Friesen 1969; Kendon 1988; McNeill 1992, Cienki 2013, Müller 1998, etc.). Various forms of combination and various combinations of gesture units are also described.

Thus, the gestural language units and the rules for their combination can be viewed as gestural vocabulary and gestural syntax (Krejdlin 2002: 50) using the lexicographic (Grigorjeva et al. 2001; Lynn 2014; Poggi 2005; Posner & Serenari 2001; Tumarkin 2002) and corpus-based approaches to their description (Grishina 2017, Nikolaeva 2013, Cienki 2017, Cienki & Iriskhanova 2018, Bressemer et al. 2018, Hinnell 2020).

There is little research on the diachronic aspect of gesturing, although there is an understanding that human gestural behaviour, like speech, changes over space and time, as well as under the influence of changing sociocultural conditions (Krejdlin 2002: 48). Evolution in gestural research is considered primarily in terms of ontogenesis, the formation of speech (the list of research papers on the speech of children is huge) and in terms of phylogeny in connection with the problem of the origin of language [McNeill 2014; Levinson & Holler 2014; Tomasello 2010; Boutet 2017]. New results in gestural research have contributed to the resumption of discussion on many issues in the theory of the origin of language. For example, D. Boutet, in contrast to the imagistic conception of gesture, proposed the hypothesis of a dual origin of symbolic gestures, relying on the kinesiological approach to the comparative study of human and primate gestures.

The semiotic aspect, in terms of the relationship between gesture and sign and the problem of historical dynamics from gesture to sign, is addressed in (Müller 2018: 13–15).

The linguistic approach to studying the changes in the system of gestures is presented, in our opinion, in the research papers by Krejdlin (2002), Collective of authors (2020b), and Poggi (2002). According to I. Poggi, the systems of gestures are organized like the lexical system of verbal language: practically every gesture can be associated with a word or expression in the language. There are relations of synonymy, homonymy, and polysemy between the units of the gestural system which exhibit both national specificity and variability. The emergence of new meanings for gestures can lead to diachronic changes if a gesture is no longer used to express its old meaning.

The linguistic approach seems to be most consistent with the purpose of our study. This study is intended to show that the system of gestures is subject to historical changes just as the system of linguistic verbal units is. The changes are expressed, on the one hand, in that new gestures or new meanings of gestures appear and, on the other hand, in that gestures become obsolete and disappear. New words often emerge through borrowing. Today, this method has extended to the gestural system. Modern television and Internet communications and the population's overall mobility contribute to the fact that people of different cultures communicate with each other directly and easily borrow the specifics of non-verbal behaviour.

The process of reducing the frequency of use is much less obvious, since outdated and, especially, obsolete gestures have little chance of being noticed by researchers. In this case, the researcher uses such materials as video

recordings (film, video, photographic documents), recordings of the speech behaviour of older people who have retained the speech habits learned in childhood, and, for more distant periods of time—the description of gestural behaviour in fiction and other sources (memoirs, diaries, transcripts), based on which the researcher reconstructs the form and meaning of the gestures. An example of such a reconstruction of gestures from literary sources is the analysis of descriptions of gestures in *Gulliver's Travels* by Defoe (Collective of authors 2020b: 167-170). In this sense, the study of obsolete and forgotten gestures requires using and combining different methods in one study, such as observation (for video materials), experiment (in conversations with representatives of different generations), reconstruction (for written sources), a comparative method, etc.

What are the outward signs of the obsolescence of gestures and linguistic units? It can be assumed that such a tendency is expressed in a decrease in the overall frequency of the gestures and changes in the conditions of their use, for example, from the category of common gestures, a gesture passes into the category of gestures of limited use, such as the sphere of communication with children. The meaning of gestures may change. As a rule, an obsolete gesture is replaced with another one.

We will search among iconic and metaphoric gestures depicting specific and abstract objects and their properties. First, they are extensively used during speech (according to research by Yu. Nikolaeva (2013), they account for the majority (37%) of all gestures accompanying speech). Second, they are to the greatest extent connected with the external world and its reflection in the minds of people, and should, therefore, to a greater extent be subject to change.

Method

In accordance with the goal of the study, which was to find evidence of the changes taking place in the system of Russian gestures, we set the following specific tasks:

- to identify gestures that can be considered new in the Russian system of gestures, describe their meanings, conditions of use, degree of novelty and origin;
- to identify gestures that can be considered obsolete, describe their meaning – both semantic and pragmatic, the context of their use in different periods, identify signs that indicate a gradual decrease in use and try to find the reason for these changes.

Various sources were used to answer these questions.

1. Gestural dictionaries and monographs that describe individual gestures and phraseological dictionaries in which the interpretation of phrases often use descriptions of their gestural accompaniment (Grigorjeva et al. 2001, Krejdlin 2004, Collective 2020a, Grishina 2017, Molotkov 2001).

2. The main source of material and research tool is the Multimodal Corpus of the RNC and its tools. In modern linguistics, it is recognised that the patterns revealed through the study of large corpus arrays of gestural data can serve as a fairly reliable source for understanding the speaker's cognitive intentions and representations in the process of constructing an utterance. In addition, recent research on multimodal communication emphasises the importance of obtaining data captured in vivo rather than experimentally (see, for example, Cienki 2016, Debras 2018, Ortega & Özürek 2019) as they contain more variants of non-verbal behaviour in different settings.

The Multimodal Russian Corpus (MURCO) is currently one of the largest open multimodal corpora in the world: its volume exceeds 5 million word tokens. The Corpus was created under the leadership of E. A. Grishina (1958–2016) in 2009–2010, initially as a cinema corpus. Later, the corpus was replenished, and samples of oral speech from various spheres of speech were included in it. The studies of E. A. Grishina on the vocabulary and grammar of oral speech (Grishina 2008, Grishina 2011, etc) as well as her major work on the system of Russian gesticulation (Grishina 2017), written based on MURCO, showed that the Multimodal Russian Corpus containing material from natural sources can be a reliable resource.

Sounding text in the Multimodal Corpus is presented in the form of audio and video files, cut into small fragments (clips) with a duration of 10–30 s, each accompanied with a fragment of the textual transcript. Generally, a pair of 'clip + text' is a relatively complete communicative fragment in the semantic sense.

Each text fragment contains metatextual, morphological, semantic, accentological and sociological annotation, which can be used for an online search on the site. The video sequence (clips) has a markup of gestures and speech acts specific for MURCO, which is carried out on a small part of the corpus, including 6 films. Thus, within the deeply annotated part of MURCO, which comprises about 2,500 clips, the user can search for fragments not only by linguistic features but also by non-verbal characteristics.

The main part of MURCO allows one to search by linguistic features. Under a query for a specific word, a combination of words, or morphological and semantic features, output contexts can be obtained with given units, which are accompanied by video clips of the corresponding fragment. Viewing clips and comparing them with transcripts allows one to select the material necessary for research from the data received.

Part of the material for research was obtained from the Multimodal Parallel Corpus, which is built on the principles of comparing different versions of the same text.

3. The main corpus of written texts (320 million word tokens) and the newspaper corpus (332 million word tokens) were used to study gestures usage in

the previous periods. It is a general fact that descriptions of gestures and postures are often included in the author's remarks when transmitting dialogues in a literary text, which makes such texts valuable material for the study of gestures. Additionally, for the same purposes and for comparison, the corpus of Russian books was used within the GoogleBooks Ngram Viewer.

4. Sources from the Internet were used for study and assessing the regarded gestures in modern usage.

The methodology that has generally been employed in corpus studies on Russian gestures was used (Grishina 2017, Savchuk & Makhova 2021). Through reference to dictionaries and reference books, a list of verbal constructions was established, which can, with a high degree of probability, be accompanied by the gestures studied. The material containing these words and constructions (text fragments and clips) was extracted from MURCO, analysed, and clips containing gestures that accompany speech were selected from it. The selected clips were included in a database containing the gestures analysed, their characteristics and the corresponding contexts. A similar work involving the corpus of written texts resulted in a database of gestures descriptions in texts of fiction from the 19th–20th centuries. The analysis of the materials included in the database enabled the stated hypothesis to be confirmed.

Results

Based on the assumption of similar processes in vocabulary and gestures (see e.g. Poggi 2002), new gestures should be searched for in the same areas in which new words tend to appear. These are primarily the areas of equipment and technology, sports, fashion, show business, travel and so on. Naturally, new gestures are more likely to emerge among young people. The study of video and text content allowed us to identify several previously unknown gestures. We have identified three gestures that have become widespread and entrenched in use. These are 'air quotes', 'show the heart' and 'facepalm'.

The gesture '**air quotes**' became popular in the 1990s. Some sources mention American comedian Steve Martin who used air quotes in his shows, and later the gesture spread not only throughout America but also Europe (russian7.ru). According to other sources, the name appeared in the 1980s, but the gesture itself was used earlier, for example, in the July 1927 edition of *Science*: 'Some years ago I knew a very intelligent young woman who used to inform us that her "bright sayings" were not original, by raising both hands above her head with the first and second fingers pointing upward. Her fingers were her "quotation marks" and were very easily understood.' (Martin, n.d.).

The gesture is a quick flexion and extension of the middle and index fingers of both hands, while the hands

are raised at head level and the gaze is directed at the interlocutor. The gesture accompanies speech and serves to express sarcasm and irony at the given moment in the conversation. It is also used to denote quotations in a broad sense – figurative meaning, quoting other people and so on, helping the speaker to distance them from the words spoken. There had been no such gestures in use in Russian gesture repertoire, so ‘air quotes’ spread rather quickly.

The **gesture ‘show the heart’** reproduces the shape of a heart performed in a pantomime mode and denotes love and sympathy. In 2013, the gesture served as the trademark of British football player Gareth Bale who displayed it to fans after each goal he scored (russian7.ru). There are many variants for performing this gesture with the fingers, usually of both hands. Some recommendations have been published on the Internet, for example, on ‘presenting the heart beautifully’ (Bol’shoy vopros.ru 2018). The gesture is widespread among public figures – athletes, artists, politicians, bloggers et al. for whom it is a way to demonstrate their attitude towards fans and audiences.

The **facepalm gesture**, ‘covering the face with one hand’, serves to demonstrate a sarcastic reaction to the perceived ridiculousness of something that someone has said. The image of a man covering his face with his hand has become an Internet meme and is widely used on social media. The most famous incarnation of the meme was a picture of Captain Jean-Luc Picard from Star Trek, played by actor Patrick Stewart (Fig. 1) (Mememaster 2016).

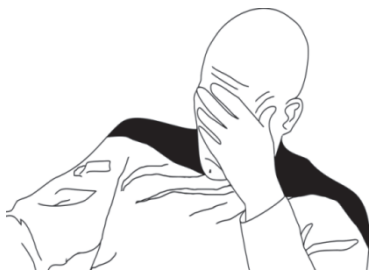


Figure 1.

According to sources, the term ‘facepalm’ began to be used on the Internet in 1996 and was included in the Oxford Dictionary in 2011. The Russian language has also assimilated it in several variants in both Cyrillic and Latin spellings (*facepalm*, *facepalm.jpg*, *ruka-litso* ‘hand-face’, *litso-ladon* ‘face-palm’ etc), the word is found in texts and dictionaries of youth slang.

It should be noted that the gesture ‘covering one’s face with one’s hand/hands’ (also, ‘hiding one’s face in one’s palms’, ‘covering one’s face with one’s hands’, ‘covering one’s eyes with one’s hand’) also has a traditional use. In Russian culture, it belongs to the class of gestures-emblems with the general meaning of ‘interrupting a person’s contact with the world’ [Collective of authors 2020a, 9]. In many cultures, including Russian, it is intended to hide the manifestation of strong emotions – grief, despair or shame. The gesturer experiences strong emotion, which

is caused by the fact that they negatively evaluate themselves or the situation in which they find themselves. The gesturer cannot cope with themselves and does not want the addressee to see the manifestation of this emotion on their face (Grigorjeva et al. 2001, 52).

The new interpretation, on the contrary, is not about a strong emotion that the speaker experiences and wants to hide from others, but rather a deliberate and open demonstration of their reaction to the words or actions of others. The nomination ‘facepalm’ belongs to this interpretation of the gesture.

- (1) *A 25–30-year-old person will just roll their eyes, make a facepalm in reaction and sit down to play Nintendo ... [Artem Lutfullin 2015].*

In addition to new gestures, gestures that are, on the contrary, obsolete, have been identified. Throughout the 20th century, their frequency of use has been decreasing, which may eventually lead to their abandonment altogether. Such obsolete gestures include what is known as ‘making a nose’ or ‘showing a nose’. This gesture is classified as iconic and is found in both speech and pantomime modes. The gesture is known in several versions, which can be illustrated with the example of various theatrical performances of Chekhov’s play Uncle Vanya included in the Multimodal parallel corpus (https://ruscorpora.ru/new/search-multiparc_rus.html).

In the play, the gesture is marked by the author’s remark:

- (2) *Voinitsky: Those who marry old men and then deceive them under the noses of all, are sane! I saw you kiss her; I saw you in each other’s arms! Astrov: Yes, sir, I did kiss her; so there. [He puts his thumb to his nose.]. [A. Chekhov. Uncle Vanya].*

There are different variants for performing this gesture, as presented below.

The thumb of the open palm is placed on the tip of the nose with the palm oriented vertically. This option is shown in Fig. 2.



Figure 2. K. Yu. Lavrov (Astrov) ‘makes a nose’ in the BDT performance based on Chekhov’s play Uncle Vanya (dir. G. Tovstonogov, E. Makarov, 1986)

The thumb of one hand is pressed to the tip of the nose, the rest of the fingers make oscillatory movements. See Fig. 3.



Figure 3. O. N. Yefremov (Astrov) ‘makes a nose’ in the Moscow Art Theatre play based on Chekhov’s *Uncle Vanya* (dir. O. N. Yefremov, 1988)

The thumb of the open palm of one hand is placed on the tip of the nose, the little finger of this hand touches the thumb of the other hand, both palms are open, the fingers are apart, motionless, tense or relaxed and make oscillatory movements. See Fig. 4.



Figure 4. D. Yu. Nazarov (Astrov) ‘makes a nose’ in the performance of O. Tabakov’s theatre based on Chekhov’s *Uncle Vanya* (dir. M. Karbauskis, 2007)

With all the differences in physical embodiment, all these gestures exaggerate the length of the nose – that is, stress the ‘size’ thereof. A long nose, as an exception to the physical norm, always attracts attention and becomes a figure of fun. It is believed that the gesture ‘showing/making a nose’ originally represented a grotesque portrait of a long-nosed man. The meaning of the gesture is the same in any variant: drawing attention to the nose, lengthening it with the help of the hands to mimic the one to whom the gesture is directed, and the greater length of the ‘nose’, the greater the degree of teasing (Collective of authors 2020a, 104). In the cultural encoding of the body, the nose is associated with the symbolism of deception (Gudkov & Kovshova 2007). Therefore, the gesture ‘showing the nose’ also hints at deception, lies; cf.: *ostavit’s nosom* ‘leave somebody with nose’ – that is, ‘making a fool of somebody’.

(3) ‘*Ku-ku!*’, he mimicked at last, **showing a long nose**. [Ye. I. Parnov. *Alexandria Gem* (1990)].

The close connection of gestures with natural language is expressed in the fact that there are stable phraseological combinations based on them, deriving their meaning from the meaning of the gesture. They are called gesture phraseological units (Grigorjeva et al. 2001). In the Russian language, there is a gestural phraseological unit, which is based on the idea of lengthening the nose: *natyanut’* [*nastavit’, nakleit’*] *nos* ‘to stretch [to put on, stick on] the nose’ (colloquial). It has two meanings. The first has to do with deceit: to deceive, fool or trick someone. The second meaning is associated with imitation, the idea of superiority, victory, boasting: getting ahead in something, doing something before others, thereby shaming or humiliating (or similar) someone (Molotkov 2001).

(4) ... *Behind the glasses of the foreigner, the fires of interest and admiration flared up more and more. ‘I am thrilled that I can sit here and talk with a Soviet scientist who suddenly left us out in the cold’* (in original *nastavil nam vsem nos*) ... [V. Dudintsev. *White robes* (1987)].

What evidence is there that the gesture ‘showing a nose’ is becoming obsolete? An indirect piece of evidence is the decline in the frequency of references to this gesture in texts, which will be shown in the RNC material in the next section.

Another gesture that is gradually becoming extinct is ‘run one’s hand over one’s throat (neck)’. It is quite widespread, often mentioned in popular publications as one of the ‘most well-known Russian gestures’ and is included in the dictionary of Russian gestures [Grigorjeva et al. 2001]. Unlike the gestures discussed above, which are more often used in the pantomime mode and do not need speech accompaniment, the gesture ‘run one’s hand over one’s throat (neck)’ itself accompanies speech, giving it an emotive character. In the dictionary, the gesture is defined as follows.

The gesturer slides the edge of his straightened palm across the throat toward the shoulder of the hand that is performing the gesture, as if he wanted to cut the throat [Grigorjeva et al. 2001, 127]. The gesture is based on two metaphors. The first is a metaphor of satiety: the gesture demonstrates that the gesturer is filled up to the throat with something that is too much. The second metaphor is the line or boundary that the gesturer draws with a sharp movement, as if to show that he does not intend to tolerate a certain situation. The verbs *to annoy*, *to bother*, *to exceed the limit* are speech analogues of the gesture. Thus, despite the various metaphors underlying the gesture, according to the dictionary, it remains one gesture.

The gesture is usually accompanied by the exclamations *Vot (vo) gde! Vot (vo) kak! Vo!* ‘I am done with!’ *Khvatit s menya!* ‘I’ve had enough of this! Enough! No more!’ *Syt po gorlo!* ‘I’m fed up!’ On the basis of

this gesture, a gestural phraseological unit is formed: *Po gorlo!* ‘a lot’, ‘up to one’s throat in work/problems’ (Grigorjeva et al. 2001, 128).

The analysis of variants of gesture use, carried out on the material of MURCO, allowed a) to identify the most typical contexts, which are accompanied by this gesture; b) to identify variants of gesture performance and their connection with different situations; c) to analyse the semantic relationship between the form and meaning of the gesture; d) to trace the dynamics of gesture use in the historical perspective and get confirmation of the occurring changes in the meaning of gesture throughout the observed historical period. The results will be discussed in the next section.

Discussion

This section deals with arguments in favour of the fact that the Russian gestural system changes over time – it learns new gestures and loses others.

Mastering new gestures

The fact that gesture has entered everyday use can be seen in linguistic reflection, e.g. in gesture description in author’s remarks commenting on dialogues in fiction and journalism, as well as in the value judgements about gestures that appear in debates about language and communication that occasionally arise on the Internet.

During the first decades of the 21st century, the ‘air quotes’ gesture came into use in different types of discourse: in direct communication and in scientific and political discourse. See the numerous references to this gesture in descriptions of various communication scenarios:

- (5) *The main benefit of the Dixy portal is the automatic search it offers the community – that is, Dixy ‘selects the right company’. Hermes pointed with his fingers near his ears with quotation marks.* [A. Ivanov. Community (2012)]. ‘I would sit at home and write my scientific work’, she made air quotes and splayed her hands in bewilderment (proza.ru/2018/12/14/279). *Dear friends, as you can see, all these brave men (accompanied by the gesture of the fingers of both hands – ‘quotation marks’) are not fighting against Putin, they are fighting against me.* [K. Kotova. Sobchak burst into tears at the debate and left the studio // Moskovskiy Komsomolets, 14 March 2018].

The gesture ‘show the heart’ can often be seen on TV and on the Internet. The gesture has been most widespread among the youth. They say there is a ‘heart boom’ on social networks: ‘And in Like and TikTok, videos are never shot without this symbol ... Likers and TikTokers display a heart with their hands’ (Bol’shoy vopros.ru 2020).

It must be said that there are various ways of conveying a warm, heartfelt attitude toward an audience through gestures, both common and more individual. These include, for example, the well-known gestural phrase that artists perform when bowing: the gesturer touches his hand (or both hands) to his chest in the heart area and extends the hand (or both hands) forward with the palm up toward the audience. There are also the author’s versions of the phrase using the same images: <...> *the conductor <...> managed to demonstrate an unusual, at least for me, a gesture of gratitude: it seemed like he took out his heart and presented it to the members of the orchestra.* [N. Dolgoplov. Covent Garden brought its swans to Moscow // Trud-7, 24 June 2003]. *Alan is a fan favourite <...> He knows how to celebrate a Goal: he runs up to the guest sector, gestures to draw a heart in the air and gives an air kiss.* [Soviet sport, 20 September 2010].

However, not all attempts to update familiar gestures go beyond individual pantomime. The gesture ‘show the heart’ has achieved mass acceptance due to its simplicity of execution and transparency of meaning and maybe because the audience was prepared to perceive this symbol by the numerous graphic images of ‘hearts in palms’ used as logos in advertising (Fig. 5).



Figure 5. Hearts in palms logos (free stock resources).

The ‘facepalm’ gesture seems to be the most interesting of the new gestures considered as is reflected in the ambiguity of the term ‘facepalm’. The meanings are:

- (6) ‘Graphic image of gesture’: ... *crushes the constant use of youth slang our localisers make in their names (though I’m not at all sure that young people really use such words/phrases in casual speech).* **facepalm zhepege.** [Comment 21 2016]. *Bacon, selfie, facepalm and 69 more new emojis have been approved for Unicode 9.* [News service Ferra 2016].
- (7) ‘A gesture expressing an emotional reaction to the situation’: *As it is used online, Briareus and Shiva have long lacked the hands to make ‘facepalms’ (sorry, litsoladoni).* [lenta.ru, 2014.09.30].
- (8) ‘A very emotional reaction to a situation’: *I haven’t managed to de-facepalm my face for half an hour.* [Zvuki i bukvy (n.d.)] *Interethnic relations cause a facepalm among Russian youth today or form a pretext for trolling.* [O. Belov, vl.aif.ru, 12 March 2014].

It seems that in this case it is not a question of mastering the gesture, but of using its name and image. The gesture is popular not so much in real life as in a virtual environment. Gesture images are actively used in social

networks and exchanged in correspondence. Internet memes and emojis with images of famous faces doing facepalm are created and distributed in the public domain (see, for example, a set of stickers). However, since much of modern man’s life is spent on the Internet, the gesture has certainly entered Russian ‘gesture practice’.

The new gestures considered have been borrowed by the Russian language. The above examples show that the spread of newly borrowed gestures occurs as a result of language contacts – communication in social networks, watching video-sharing platforms (YouTube, Whatsapp, TikTok etc.).

The availability of such communication channels determines the ease of intercultural communication and the rapid exchange of information, including new words and verbal and behavioural patterns. This is also facilitated by the demands of fashion, the factor of imitation of “influencers” that is so intrinsic to social media. As a result, their habits, speech and gestural behaviour are repeated and absorbed by their followers. This explains the rapid spread, in comparison with that of past periods, of new words, fixed expressions and gestures, especially in the form of Internet memes, among today’s youth. This makes horizontal ties stronger, brings together representatives of the same generation, even those belonging to different linguistic communities, more than the commonality of one language unites representatives of different generations. Global memes, symbols, clothing details and so on become mutually understandable to young people, but need to be explained to their parents’ generation.

Obsolete gestures: The case of ‘showing a nose’

The study of microdiachronic changes in the functioning of the gesture ‘showing/making a nose’ carried out on the corpus of written texts of the RNC has shown that the gesture is becoming less common. In our database, the gesture ‘showing/making a nose’ was mentioned 38 times in the texts of the main corpus of written texts. These are mainly texts of fiction and memoirs. Another 8 examples were found in the corpus of modern press containing newspaper texts from the 2000s. An analysis of text distribution that mention the gesture under study showed that most of them (70%) are concentrated in texts relating to the period 1870–1949. The remaining 30% were distributed among texts created in the second half of the 20th century and in the early 2000s. All 8 occurrences in the newspaper corpus relate to the modern period, but the nomination ‘showing a nose’ is found mainly in a figurative sense. The analysis of text distribution by the authors’ date of birth shows that the decline in the frequency of the gesture is even more evident: the majority of authors (86%) who mentioned the gesture ‘showing/making a nose’ were born before the middle of the 20th century (see Fig. 6).

As well as the differences in frequency, an analysis of the contexts reveals meaningful differences in pragmatics. The texts of the 19th to the early 20th century show that the gesture was performed by adults and children, men and women. It was performed playfully, flirtatiously, sar-

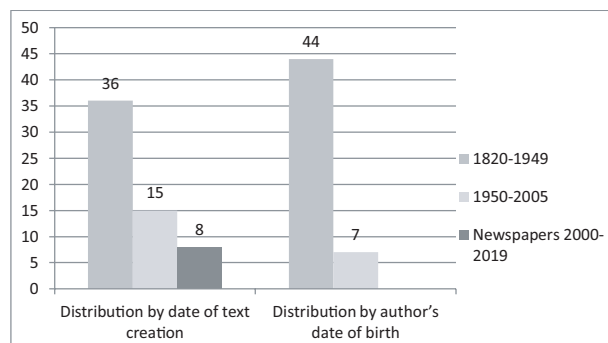


Figure 6. Distribution of texts mentioning gesture ‘showing/making a nose’ by date of creation and by author’s date of birth.

castically and so on (in an official setting it was of course unacceptable). According to modern texts, it is clear that this gesture is used for imitation and mocking. It is used in communication with children or between children, often in combination with the gesture ‘stick out the tongue’. In modern use, for the meaning of ‘to deceive, to fool’, other gestures are more often used.

What is coming to replace the obsolescent gesture? According to the same Multimodal parallel corpus, in two productions of Chekhov’s play, to interpret Chekhov’s remarks, the actors used the gesture ‘showing a fig’. The gesture is ruder but is a synonym of the gesture ‘showing a nose’ in the meaning of ‘to deceive, to leave with nothing’ (see Figs 7–8).



Figure 7. V. M. Solomin (Astrov) ‘shows a fig’ in a performance of the Maly Theatre based on Chekhov’s Uncle Vanya (dir. S. Solovyev, 1986).



Figure 8. A. M. Domogarov (Astrov) ‘shows a fig’ in a performance of the Moscow City Council Theater based on Chekhov’s Uncle Vanya (dir. A. Konchalovsky, 2010).

In the case of the gesture with ‘nose’ the hero’s cue, ‘Yes, sir, I did kiss her’ can be verbally interpreted as ‘Yes, sir, I did kiss her, and you’ve got your nose (that is, nothing)’, then in the case of the gesture with ‘fig’, it implies ‘Yes, I did kiss her, sir, and you get a fig (that is, nothing)’ (cf.: phraseological units *fig/figa/kukish/dulya s makom/ s maslom* etc). Comparing the contexts of the expressions ‘doing/showing/pulling the nose’ or ‘leave with a nose’ (‘to be tricked, fooled’) suggests that the gesture with ‘nose’ is less rude and more universal. However, the gesture with ‘fig’, is gradually losing its rough connotations and acquiring mildly rude, familiar and mocking shade. For the actors and the director, it seemed to be a more modern alternative to the obsolescent ‘nose’ gesture.

Obsolete gestures: The case of ‘running ones hand over ones throat (neck)’

A composition of verbal constructions accompanied by the gesture ‘to run ones hand over ones throat (neck)’ has been established.

- I. Deictic words *vot + gde, zd’es’, tut + (sidit ‘sit’, stoit ‘stand’)*: *vot ona u menja gde sidit, vot gde, uzhe vot gde, vot uzhe gde, vot uzhe gde stoit, pesni mne uzhe vot zdes* ‘I’ve had it up to here!’
- II. Deictic words *vot + tak + syt (po gorlo ‘up to my throat’)*: *vot tak uzhe syt, syt po gorlo ‘fed up’*
- III. Deictic words *vot + tak, kak + nadojelo*: *vot tak nadoeli, vo kak nadoelo, dostala!* ‘I’m sick of it!’, ‘I’ve had it up to here!’
- IV. Deictic words *vot + tak, kak + nuzhno*: *vot tak nuzhno, vo kak nuzhno, nuzhno pozarez* ‘I really need it’, ‘extremely necessary’.

Based on requests containing elements of the listed constructions fragments of movie transcripts accompanied by clips were obtained. Viewing them allowed choosing 38 clips containing the gestures of interest to us. Analysis of the chosen gestures and the accompanying text revealed cases of asymmetrical relationships between gesture and meaning.

1) One phrase – different gestures. This situation shows how the gesture participates in the formation of the meaning of the statement. The same verbal sequence (*vot gde*) can be accompanied by different gestures, imparting different meanings to the statement.

(9) [Alya (Olga Krasko)]

Speech row	<i>U menja tvoji forteli uzhe</i> With your tricks	<i>vot gde.</i> I’ve had it up to here!
Gesture row		puts his hand to his neck
[Victor Buturlin, Vladimir Yereimin. I have an idea, film (2003)]		

(10) [Sasha (Sergey Parshin)]

Speech row	<i>Ty s Lariskoj ne spor’! U nego muzhiki</i> Don’t argue with Lariska! Her men are	<i>vo gde!</i> here!
Gesture row		shows fist
[Vladimir Valutskiy, Igor Maslennikov. Winter cherry, film (1985)]		

(11) [Sladkov (Yuriy Tolubeyev)]

Speech row	<i>U menja ego talanty</i> Of his talents	<i>vot gde sidjat!</i> I am tired!
Gesture row		knocks on the back of the neck
[Friedrich Ermler, Konstantin Isayev. Unfinished story, film (1955)]		

In example (9), the gesture ‘put one’s palm to the base of the neck’ means ‘tired’, ‘fed up with something’. In example (10), the clenched fist gesture demonstrates power, strength (cf.: *to keep everything in a fist*). In example (11), the ‘tap on the back of the neck’ gesture (see Fig. 15) conveys the meaning ‘tired of the burden, tired of carrying the weight’ (cf.: *sitting on the neck*). The clenched fist gesture belongs to a different group and will not be considered further. Here, we are dealing with homonymous gestures.



Figure 9. *forteli vot gde* ‘that’s where’ ‘I’ve had it up to here!’



Figure 10. *muzhiki vo gde* ‘that’s where’.

2) One gesture – different variants. Studying the material, variability in form of the gestures was revealed. The gesture of ‘hand–throat (neck)’ type appears with the variants ‘touch’, ‘put a hand’, ‘hold with the edge of the palm/thumb/index finger’, ‘knock with the edge of the palm’ or ‘take by the neck’ as if trying to strangle (see Figs 11–12). These variants correlate with speech formulas *syt po gorlo* ‘fed up’, *nadojelo* ‘tired’, *vot gde sidit* ‘that’s where (it is)’.

The difference between the variants lies in the intensity of the emotion and its direction (activity or passivity). Cf.: ‘Folk’ interpretations of the gesture: ‘With the edge of the palm – sharp, spiteful (‘I’ve had enough of everything!’). A strangulation gesture is more desperate or hopeless (‘I’ve been completely strangled’).

The gestures accompanying the request with the meaning ‘very, desperately needed’ have the following variants: ‘to swipe with the edge of the palm, thumb at the throat (neck)’ and ‘touch the throat (neck)’. (see Figs 13–14)



Figure 11. *pesni mne uzhe vot zdes* ‘up to here’.



Figure 12. *syt po gorlo!* ‘Fed up!’.



Figure 13. *prostoz pozarezh neobhodimo* ‘absolutely necessary’.



Figure 14. *vot tak nuzhen* ‘needed badly’.

It was a big surprise to find 14 cases of using the gesture of ‘hand – back of the head (neck)’ type in the material. It is also performed in several variants: ‘to touch the back of the head (neck)’, ‘to put ones hand on the back of the head (neck)’, ‘to point ones hand at the back of the head (neck)’, ‘to tap on the back of the head (neck)’.

The difference between these variants lies in the degree of emotion intensity: high intensity is expressed by multiple repetitions of the gesture, e.g. running the edge of the palm near the neck several times (sawing), tapping on the back of the neck several times etc.



Figure 15. *talanty vot gde sidjat!* ‘his talents are here!’.



Figure 16. *vot ona gde eta banda* ‘this is where this gang is’

3) One gesture – different meanings. Polysemy. In the annotated part of MURCO with gestures marked, it was possible to find that the gesture ‘run one’s hand over one’s throat (neck)’ occurs in two types of contexts. On the one hand, in combination with constructions from groups (I)–(III), it is used in the meaning of ‘tired’, ‘fed up with’ (*nadojelo, syt po gorlo* that is, ‘not needed’), described in (Grigorjeva et al. 2001), on the other hand, in combination with constructions from group (IV) – in the meaning of ‘very necessary, extremely necessary’. Semantically, the situations are opposite; nevertheless, we tend to think of these as different meanings of the same gesture. In the first case (‘tired’) it is an expression of an emotional state, in the second it is a request, but also expressed emotionally. The high intensity of the desire to get rid of something, on the one hand, and the desire to get something, on the other hand, unites these two meanings. Thus, we can clarify the meaning of the gesture ‘run one’s hand over one’s throat (neck)’ the following way: it emphasises a high degree of a certain quality – either a high level of filling, dipping (*that’s where, right here, up to here*) or high intensity (*that’s how, like that*). Gesture stroke is aligned with deictic elements of the verbal constructions accompanied by the gesture in all contexts regarded. Note that in the classification of gestures developed by E. A. Grishina and embedded in the MURCO search system [Grishina 2017], it is precisely this interpretation of the gesture in question that is proposed (<https://ruscorpora.ru/new/help-gestures.html>).

It can also be assumed that the gesture ‘to swipe with thumb at the throat (neck)’, which denotes an action associated with death (see, in particular, Ekman 1969: 61), is

also associated with both situations: cf. *nadoelo do smerti* ('tired to death') and *nuzhno pozarez* ('desperately needed', 'matter of life and death'; literally meaning of *pozarez* is connected with 'cutting with a knife', that is also, *to death*).

4) One meaning – different gestures. Synonymy

Constructions containing deictic elements *vot gde*, *vot zdes* (*sidit*) 'that's where (sits)' may be accompanied by different gestures. When pronouncing these words, the speaker in some cases localises the gesture in the area of the front of the neck, throat or upper chest, and in other cases, in the area of the back of the neck, nape or shoulders. Gestures with a hand at the throat refer to the idea of overflow or satiety, they are associated with the phraseological unit 'fed up with something'. Gestures with a hand on the back of the head are associated with the phraseological unit 'to sit on the neck' – that is, the idea of a heaviness or burden that interferes with life, causing tiredness. At the same time, in modern usage, the meanings of gestures coincide, enabling us to talk about the synonymy of gestures. Synonymous gestures have different inner form, refer to different 'etymons', but they are used in similar contexts and accompany the same speech formula. So, for example, in Molotkov's dictionary, the construction *vot gde sidit* 'that's where sits' is considered a stable unit with the following interpretation: 'Expression of annoyance, irritation, displeasure etc., usually accompanied by a gesture indicating the neck, head or back of the head. About someone or about something that causes great trouble, problem etc.' (Molotkov 394).

A small survey conducted twice in different audiences confirmed the synonymy of both gestures. Respondents were presented with two contexts containing dialogues from which the author's remarks describing the gestures were excluded. The task was to reproduce the missing gestures. Although the author's remarks described different gestures, respondents performed the same gestures in both contexts.

As for using synonymous gestures in modern Russian, there are significant differences between them. The 'hand-neck' gesture is more common than the 'hand-back of the head (neck)' gesture. In our material, the former was encountered 25 times (66%), the latter, 7 times (18%). The gesture, 'hand-back of the head', is almost exclusively used in contexts containing the verb *to sit*. The 'hand-neck' gesture is more universal and is used in diverse contexts.

This ratio of synonyms can be explained if we approach the analysis of the collected material from a diachronic point of view. The material has been regarded according to the date of the films' creation and the date of the actors' birth. It turned out that the 'hand-back of the neck' gesture is found in films released before 1970, and is performed by actors born no later than the first third of the 20th century (in 1891, 1898, 1905, 1927, 1934, 1936 and 1937). The 'hand-neck' gesture is found in both old (1960s) and modern films. There is every reason to assume the 'hand-back of the neck' gesture to be obsolete.

Examples from the corpus of written texts may support this hypothesis.

The analysis of contexts containing the construction *vot gde/tut/zdes* '+*sidet*' (in the form of 2nd/3rd person singular/plural) showed that the performance of the 'hand-neck' gesture meets in author's remarks in modern texts in the huge majority of cases.

(12) *I am done with such pranks. And he pointedly ran his hand along his throat. Strange, but the irritation suited him.* [Tatyana Sakharova. A kind fairy with sharp teeth (2005)].

(13) *'This is where I have your Saigon,' he sharply ran the edge of his hand over his throat.* [Yu. I. Andreyeva. Assembly ellipsis (2009)].

In 19th–early-20th centuries' texts, the gesture 'hand-the back of the head' is usually presented, but synonymous gestures also appear.

(14) *We already know what her feelings are; but that's enough for me (points to the back of the head).* [M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin. Provincial essays (1856–1857)].

(15) *'Gymnasium; women's gymnasium!' the general repeats, slashing himself across the throat with the edge of his hand as a sign that he cannot stand the idea of the gymnasium any longer.* [M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin. Satires in prose (1859–1862)].

A total of 14 contexts were selected containing the 'hand-back of the head' remark and 15 contexts with the 'hand-throat (neck)' remark. The results by the chronological distribution of texts are shown in Figs 17–18.

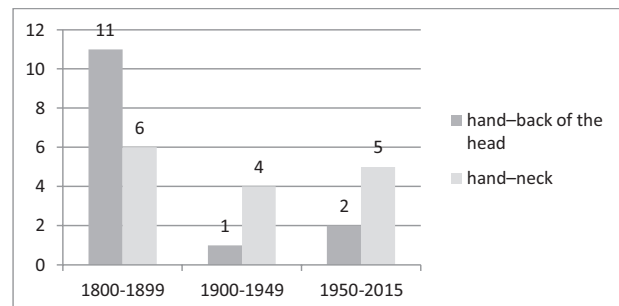


Figure 17. Distribution of gestures by date of text creation.

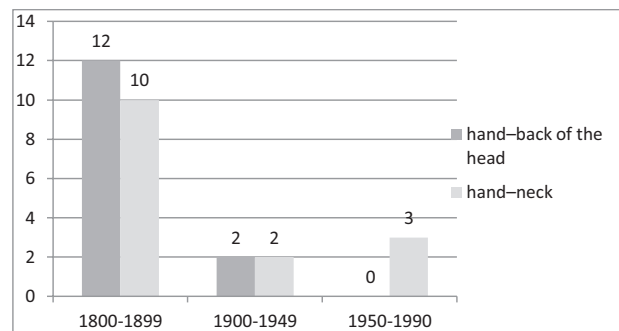


Figure 18. Distribution of gestures by author's date of birth.

According to the results, the description of gestures in fiction confirms our hypothesis about the competition among synonymous gestures and clarifies the diachronic perspective of the process. In 19th century texts, there were gestures ‘point to the back of the head (neck)’ and ‘to run a hand over the throat (neck)’. Up to the middle of the 20th century, the gesture ‘point to the back of the head (neck)’ is retained in the language of the older generation (writers and actors born in the first third of the 20th century). Since the middle of the 20th century, the gesture ‘point to the back of the head (neck)’ is all but falling out of use and is being replaced by the gesture ‘point to the throat (neck)’ in most contexts. The above mentioned survey also confirms that this particular variant has won.

Conclusion

In our study, we proceeded from the understanding shared by many linguists and psychologists that gestures and speech form a single system. It follows that the system of gestures and its functioning are also subject to change, just as the language system is. In our research, we found evidence of such changes: we addressed specific examples of gestures that have recently entered the system of Russian gestures, on the one hand, and gestures that are leaving it, on the other hand.

We can assume that this process of renewal continues on an ongoing basis and that in some periods of history it can intensify. Not all new gestures pass the barrier of selection and codification: most of them have a short life and are forgotten, while some remain confined within certain social, professional and age groups. And only a few gestures, under the influence of favourable factors, achieve widespread use and become part of a national system of gestures, and may then even be used in intercultural communication. This is not a quick process: just look at the history of mastering the gesture ‘air quotation marks’: almost 100 years have passed from the first mention in 1927 to its modern global distribution. But even now there is an ambiguous attitude to this gesture: for some, this gesture has become necessary and is used as intended; for others, it is a sign of commitment to something new and fashionable, while others do not actively accept this gesture, viewing it contrived and unnecessary.

The process of producing new gestures, like new words, is continuous; it is determined by the creative nature of the language, as well as by human nature, the desire to stand out. For the younger generation, it is the desire for self-identification using external behavioural signs. The future of new gestures as well as new words is largely determined by external factors. Technological progress contributes to the diffusion rate of innovations.

The new generally replaces the old by displacing and ousting it. Like words and expressions, gestures may

fall out of use. This is the other side of the language change process. The emergence (invention or borrowing) of new gestures and new meanings often leads to the emergence of gesture variants. In turn, gesture variants or gesture synonyms start to compete and, as a result, one of the variants or one of the synonyms is ousted to the periphery, its functionality becomes limited and its scope of use narrows.

On the other hand, gestures (similarly to words) may fall out of use due to external factors. For example, the greeting ‘raising the hat’ (a male gesture common in the 19th – early 20th centuries) has practically disappeared from the repertoire of gestures of etiquette, as wearing a hat has become optional. Due to the dissolution of the organisation Young Pioneers, the ‘pioneer salute’ has also become a thing of the past as a gesture of greeting. These gestures nowadays may be done in a purely ironic sense or used as a humorous greeting.

It is rather difficult to determine which gestures are currently fading out. As one possible way to determine this, we propose comparing the frequency characteristics of gestures and/or their descriptions in the texts of different periods using the corpus data. Perhaps the additional annotation of gestures in the Multimodal Corpus will expand the range of gestures studied and create new possibilities for studying them.

Studies over a short historical period (200 years), which are commonly called microdiachronic, have helped reveal changes in the use of iconic gestures, which are more related to vocabulary and phraseology than others. The question arises of whether the gestures involved in conveying categorical linguistic meanings change over time. It would be interesting to investigate which types of gestures (deictic, iconic, pragmatic or rhetorical) are more susceptible to linguistic changes.

A promising area in terms of studying diachronic changes in gestures is the analysis of gestural phraseological units and, in particular, somatic phraseological units and their inner form, which are based on the description of a gesture, posture or facial expression. Such analysis may result in the identification of both living gestures and those that have already disappeared but have left the memory of their form.

The creation of gestural dictionaries will facilitate the study of changes in the system of gestures. There have been attempts to create such dictionaries for various languages, however, there is no complete dictionary description of the gestural repertoire for any language.

In our article, we have not touched upon the typological aspect in the study of gestures, as this is a separate big problem. Different languages have their own gesture systems that have much in common but differ in national specificities. The comparative study of different national gestural lexicons also seems to open up great prospects for a diachronic view of the development of gestural systems.

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