

## Co-teachers' Coordinated Gestures as Resources for Giving Instructions in the EFL Classroom

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Giving instructions for a classroom activity can be a tricky business in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, especially when the students' proficiency level is low and the instruction is composed of multiple steps. Teachers may depend on linguistic resources only so far as students can understand the words and grammar used, which limits the scope of verbal communication in giving instructions. When an instruction is composed of multiple steps, signaling when to carry out an individual component in the instruction may also require additional interactional work. Previous research on gesture in language classrooms has largely focused on gesture as a means to provide comprehensible input (e.g., Lazaraton, 2004; Taleghani-Nikazm, 2008) or its role in error correction (e.g., Muramoto, 1999). Gesture as a component of classroom management technique, e.g., regulating turn-taking traffic between a teacher's instruction-giving and students' response production, has rarely been discussed in the literature so far. This short analysis illustrates one way through which two co-teachers signal the completion of instruction-giving and elicit students' response to the instruction (i.e., compliance). It will be shown that co-teachers' simultaneous gesturing, with or without accompanying verbal instruction, adds clarity to the instruction as something to be responded to immediately. In other words, when co-teachers produce the same gesture simultaneously, students tend to take it as a signal to carry out the instructed action.

The data were taken from a teaching demonstration session video-taped in a second-grade classroom in South Korea. The class has seven students and is led by two teachers: one "lead-teacher" (Korean homeroom teacher) and one "co-teacher" (native speaker of English). The primary language used in the class is English although the Korean homeroom teacher switches to Korean when the need arises. The video is 42 minutes long, and shows a class from the beginning to the end. The lesson is mainly composed of a review of the previous lesson (learning vocabulary such as *a bee, an eagle, an apple*, etc.) and four games through which students can practice these words using a question-answer sequence (e.g. Q: "What's this?" A: "It's a bee").

In the examples presented below, students are playing "What's on my back?" game. The game is largely composed of three steps. First, the students are instructed to close their eyes and put their heads down to the desk. Then, teachers stick a picture of various objects on their backs. Lastly, the students are to get up and ask other students to see what object s/he has on their backs. The goal of this game is to find out what object one has on his/her back, through asking "what's this?" and understanding the answer. All three extracts are taken from this game but they are not in chronological order. In Extract 1, the teachers have just come back to the front of the classroom after completing sticking pictures on the back of the students. The Korean homeroom teacher (K) gives instructions to the students to now open their eyes and raise their heads (line 01, 02), while the native speaker teacher (J) is standing next to her.

**Extract 1**

- 01 K: ((returning to the front))-now:, open yer eye:s,  
 02 en raise yer head.  
 03 (0.2)  
 04 °‘kay’?=
- 05 J: =((both hands moving up and down, palms upward))-heads u:p,  
 06 K: ((J’s hand motion continues))-h↑eads up,  
 07 Ss: ((beginning to raise head))  
 08 K: ((both hands on cheek, close and open hands))-open yer eye:s,  
 09 J: ((K’s hand motion continues))-Michael heads up,  
 10 K: ((both hands down)) ↓u:h ↑ask yer  
 11 {{{hands put together))-classmates,}(. ) what’s this.  
 12 (0.2)  
 13 ((right hand making circle quickly))-(. )  
 14 now,  
 15 J: ‘kay’?-((palms upward, beginning to raise hands))
- 16 K: → rea[dy-((raise both hands))], [Figure 1]  
 17 J: → [ ((raise both hands)) ]  
 18 K: → [((down both hands))-st]a:rt. [Figures 2, 3]  
 19 J: → [ ((down both hands)) ]  
 20 Ss: → ((starts standing up and moving around))  
 21 S1: ((showing his back to S2))-what’s this,  
 22 S2: It’s a bee.



Figure 1 (“Ready?”)



Figure 2 (“Start”)



Figure 3 (“Start”)

From lines 01 to 09, co-teachers get the students to open their eyes and raise their heads. K first gives verbal instruction, “Now open your eyes and raise your head” (lines 01-02), only to be followed by silence (0.2 pause in line 03). K’s soft “okay?” follows, and J jumps in (line 05), saying a more simplified instruction “heads up” with both hands moving up and down. K repeats “heads up” with elongation at “up” (line 06), and the students slowly begin to raise their heads (line 07). After all students’ heads are up, K instructs them to ask each other what picture they have on their backs, saying, “u:h ask your classmates, what’s this” (line 10). Again, K’s instruction is not followed by the students’ response as the students remain still in their seats (line 12). K now quickly makes a circle with her right hand (line 13) and adds, “now” (line 14), explicitly indicating the instruction is to be followed immediately. J jumps in at this point, saying “okay?” as she slowly raises her hands with the palms held upward. This is followed by K’s explicit signaling of ‘go ahead’ beginning with “ready?” (line 16). As K is saying “ready”, she raises her hands upward, and J does the same at the same time with K, producing a synchronized body movement of the two teachers (Figure 1). K then says, “start”, and both K and J lower their hands within K’s turn (lines 18, 19) (Figure 2 and 3). Now, the students get up and begin

walking around the classroom and asking each other questions. Thus, we see that, the initial verbal instruction “ask your classmates, what’s this” is, in the absence of the students’ response, followed by a series of turns by both K and J that indicate when the instruction is to be carried out (i.e., now). The final cue is given verbally by K (“ready, start”), but we see that both teachers produce a coordinated gesture to accompany and augment the verbal cue.

The next example shows that, without accompanying verbal instruction, coordinated gesture alone can cue the timing of the students’ response to the instruction. Here, the lesson is transitioning from one game to the next and the teachers are telling the students to rearrange their desks. In the previous game, the students had to arrange their desks to make two groups. Right before the extract, the class has just wrapped up the previous game, and K collected picture cards from the students and placed them on her desk. K is now returning to the front of the classroom (line 01).

### Extract 2

- 01 K: ((coming back to the white board))-now:, it’s time to:,  
 02 ((moves the magnet from the second to third game, facing the board))-(.) °uh°  
 03 what’s in my [back, ]  
 04 J: [((points the stick at the third game))]  
 05 S1: \*>°kukey mondey°<=  
 06 K: ={{(turning to Ss)}-game.}  
 07 S?: syl syl syl,  
 08 K: it’s a very fun game. {{(separating motion))-let’s- uh  
 09 separate-} the desks, [Figure 1]  
 10 (0.2)  
 11 → ((two hands separating motion))-\*\*cha wolley [chali lo:. ]  
 12 J: → [(\*kay?)-((steps out))]  
 13 → [((separating motion))] [Figure 2]  
 14 K: → [((separating motion))]  
 15 Ss: → ((stand up to move their desks to the original arrangement)) [Figure 3]

\* “What’s that?”

\*\* “Okay, to the original position.”



Figure 1 (“desks”)



Figure 2



Figure 3

As she returns to the white board placed at the front center of the classroom, K says “now, it’s time to” (line 01), then turns to the board and moves a magnet from the name of the previous game written on the board to the next game (line 02). Then, she reads the name of the game (line 03) still facing the board. J points the name of the game with a stick, overlapping with “back” (line 04). While K pauses a little bit after reading the name of the game, one student asks his classmate in a quick pace, “what is that” in Korean (line 05). K continues, turning back to the

students, and finishes her utterance with “game” (line 06). Then, K gives instructions to put the desks back to the original position (i.e. facing the front) from the group work formation (i.e. facing each other in circles). In lines 08-09, K says, “let’s uh- separate the desks”, putting her hands together then spreading them outward. However, the students do not show any sign of responding (line 10). K continues the hand gesture and switches to Korean, saying “to the original position” (line 11). Overlapping with K’s utterance, J chimes in, taking a step forward and saying “okay?” (line 12). Now, both K and J repeat the separating gesture simultaneously (lines 13, 14), without any accompanying verbal instruction. It is after the completion of this synchronized gesture by the teachers that the students respond by getting up and moving the desks (line 15). Thus, in this example, the teachers’ coordinated gesturing signals that the students’ response to the instruction is expected now.

In the last example, teachers inadvertently “cue” the expectation for the students’ immediate compliance while producing a synchronized gesture, when in fact instruction-giving is still in progress. In Extract 3, K is explaining how they are going to play the next game. She explains that first, the students should close their eyes and put their heads down (lines 01, 02) while the teachers put a picture on the back of each student.

### Extract 3

01	K:	you will, (( <i>hand gesture around eyes</i> ))-close yer eyes, en	
02	→	put ↑yer {(( <i>head down</i> ))-head [down, ]}	[Figure 1]
03	J:	→ [(( <i>head down</i> ))]	
04	→	[ (( <i>head down</i> )) ]	[Figure 2]
05	Ss:	→ [(( <i>a few students put their heads down</i> ))]	
06	K:	[ while I, ]	
07		{(( <i>hand gesturing “no”</i> ))-not yet,} just listen,	[Figure 3]
08	S1:	(( <i>heads up</i> ))-syl syl	
09	K:	(.) while I stick a photo in yer back.	



Figure 1 (“head down”)



Figure 2 (“While I”)



Figure 3 (“Not yet”)

As K says “put your heads down” (line 02), in a rising intonation, she lowers her head as well. Overlapping with K’s “down”, J joins in to gestured instruction and lowers her head as well (lines 03) (Figure 1). We can see that a few students immediately respond to this, putting their heads down (line 05) (Figure 2). However, K’s instruction is not complete yet. K continues, adding a *while*-clause (line 06), but this is abandoned mid-turn as she stops and tells the students to listen up (line 07). A few students raise their heads again (line 08), and K continues giving instructions (line 09). Thus, we see that, at least for some students, the teachers’ synchronized gesturing cued the expectation for them to immediately follow the instruction.

In sum, examples here illustrate one way through which teachers communicate the completion of instruction-giving and expectation for the compliance with instructions. As shown, teachers in low-level EFL classrooms may confront a challenge of instruction-giving in two

fronts: (1) conveying the content of the instructions (e.g. “do what?”) and (2) signaling the timing of carrying out the instructed action (e.g. “do it when?”). Here, I tried to illustrate how the second issue can be dealt with. In examples 1 and 2, we see how the two co-teachers that are facing delayed student response to the instruction resort to gestural reinforcement or repetition of the verbal instruction to elicit students’ immediate compliance. The last example shows how the coordinated gesture of the teachers send a robust signal to the students to carry out the instruction immediately even when the accompanying verbal instruction is not necessarily designed in such a way (i.e. using “You will...” instead of “Let’s” or an imperative form, a rising intonation that implies a further instruction to come). If we consider a successful implementation of classroom activities as an integral part of successful teaching, every aspect of the implementing processes may deserve our attention, including a simple interactional technique employed in turn-taking between teachers and students.

## REFERENCES

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