



May 3, 2021

To: Dr. Mirjam Friedová and Examination committee for Jakub Jehlička

In re: External Examiner's Report on the Dissertation of Jakub Jehlička "Gesture and Eventuality: A Crosslinguistic Study", submitted to the Department of Linguistics (2021)

**The thesis is acceptable with no revisions. I look forward to attending the public dissertation defense on June 24, 2021.**

In recent years, the field of cognitive linguistics - which centers on the study of language from a cognitive perspective - has been characterized by a turn towards the exploration of real-world, face-to-face interaction. This 'interactional turn' (Feyaerts et al. 2017: 136) and its commitment to conversation as the primary locus of language use has placed both oral language and its embodied nature at the forefront of linguistic analysis. Thus, the study of multimodality - particularly of co-speech gesture - is gaining prominence in the study of language and cognition.

Within this context, in his dissertation, Jakub Jehlička has delivered an excellently presented, theoretically rich, and timely contribution to the study of embodied language. Jehlička examines the multimodal expression of event structure from a cognitive perspective. The focus is on an event's unfolding over time (*aspect*) and the qualitative state of an event (*telicity*), paying particular attention to the boundedness of an event. The dissertation consists of two primary studies. Firstly, in a cross-linguistic (Czech/English) corpus study of spontaneous language, Jehlička investigates mappings between *aspectual* contours and *gestural* contours of an event. While supporting previous findings that bounded and unbounded gestures pattern non-randomly with certain event types, he also addresses and attempts to disentangle some of the factors that drive the degree of variance in the results and that may underlie the choice of a particular gestural form in a particular interactional and linguistic context. In the second study - a behavioral experiment consisting of stimuli created in a motion capture lab - the author investigates the comprehension of multimodal patterns of event structure. This study is on Czech only and validates the results of the corpus study.

This dissertation represents a theoretically sound and richly motivated contribution to the fields of cognitive linguistics and gesture studies. It presents two studies featuring different methods, one corpus and one behavioural study. Both studies are meticulous in their design, with advantages and potential pitfalls of each design decision clearly identified for the reader. Furthermore, the thorough quantitative analyses presented in each study are supported by qualitative analyses that address some of the variance found in the results. In this section of the report, I detail more specifically the aspects that lead me to this most positive evaluation of the dissertation.



I found this dissertation to be a pleasure to read. The prose itself is succinct and the argumentation is logical, clearly structured, and thoroughly laid out for the reader to follow. This is no small feat in a work of this scale. It adheres to all expected forms of a dissertation: references are appropriately cited in the text and bibliography; terms are explained as they are introduced; footnotes are used judiciously and appropriately; and graphs and tables are consistent in their presentation format. There are some grammatical infelicities, but these are minor errors given the enormous task of writing a dissertation in excellent, nuanced, English prose as a non-native speaker, at which the author has truly excelled. None of these led to any confusion, but were a minor distraction at most.

The aim of the dissertation is clear from the first pages. Namely, the author sets out to explore “the relation between formal characteristics of gestural movement and the linguistic expression of event structure in two languages: English and Czech” (p.5). The author then details how he will conduct his investigation (p.6), and outlines the structure of the dissertation (p.7). Results are foreshadowed in the abstract (p.ii), though it would have helped to have the high level findings reported in the introduction as well.

The author’s review of the current state of the field (i.e., secondary sources) in the dissertation is impressive. In fact, I believe it is one of (many of) the major strengths of the dissertation. Not only does it display a depth and breadth of expertise that is exceptional for an early stage scholar, but it allows the author to situate very precisely the contribution of the dissertation (a matter to which I return below). The author lays the groundwork for his research in the Chapters 2 through 4. Rather than simply repeating claims from cited research, the author critically reviews literature and coalesces it into a cohesive discussion of the literature. This displays a deep and nuanced understanding of the field (e.g., the discussion of Kendon’s continuum in §2.1, in which he critically evaluates the four dimensions of the continuum, introducing its problematic Anglocentricity and the fact that it does not take into account the range of properties of sign language). The author also points out that some of the classic interpretation of the continuum (McNeill 1992) is in fact itself misconstrued. Similar critical analyses are presented throughout. For example, he is not afraid to express disagreement with some claims made to date (e.g. with the basic premise of one of the major studies of aspect and gesture to date - Cienki and Iriskhanova, 2018 - namely that “French, German, and Russian share two broad aspect(ual) categories in their verbs systems” (p.61, cited on p.94), and furthermore points out some problems with their coding system (see p.99). He also includes fair yet critical assessment of my own work (see p.97).

When presenting previous studies and relevant research, the author clearly delineates their relevance to the dissertation studies that follow in Chapters 5 and 6. This is most beneficial to the reader. To give just one example of this, after reviewing the literature just mentioned, the reader is informed that ‘an alternative way will be proposed’ in this dissertation (p.99), and provides the relevant section number in the subsequent chapter. Similar signposts make navigating the dissertation intuitive.

The two studies are based on data collection, the methods of which are justified and soundly executed. The tools used for analyses in particular demonstrate a strong grasp of the important elements of data analysis. For example, the corpus study in Chapter 5 makes use of random forests,



an appropriate alternative to logistic regression that is suitable when assumptions of regression models cannot be met (p.121), whereas the behavioral study in Chapter 6 appropriately uses two multiple regression analyses to investigate the predictors of aspectual choice.

To close this evaluation, I move focus on the contribution this dissertation makes to the field. In sum, the dissertation represents an original contribution that takes into account and responds to a breadth of previous research on multimodal event structure. It examines eventuality in two typologically diverse languages (English and Czech) and provides converging evidence from both a corpus study and a behavioral study regarding the nature of event construal from a multimodal perspective. It lays out its goals vis-a-vis previous studies, identifying clearly the gap it addresses. In the author's own words: "The primary objective of this study was to explore the multimodal expression of eventuality from a cognitive perspective, building upon a number of studies dedicated to this topic, but departing from them in four major aspects: (i) focus on gesture production "in the wild" rather than during narratives in controlled settings; (ii) complex approach to gesture form based on complementary sets of features; (iii) analyzing the data using multifactorial methods and usage-based factors; (iv) embedding the analysis into the Multimodal CxG framework" (p.176). The findings are clearly delineated, demonstrating stable patterns of multimodal marking of aspectual types. In the discussion that closes the final chapter, the author relates these findings to a hot topic in the field of multimodal linguistics, namely that of variation in co-speech patterns, particularly discussing which types of variance in multimodal patterns can be shown to be relevant to conventionalization in gesture.

If I had the opportunity to sit down in person with the candidate and discuss his research, I would welcome hearing his responses to the following questions:

- (i) Much of the theory you rely on in your dissertation (eventuality, event structure, force-dynamics, etc.) came of age in an era in which language was investigated monomodally. What do you think we need to change in the theory given findings such as those you present in your dissertation?
- (ii) You very clearly articulate the challenges in gathering good corpus data as well as challenges inherent in creating natural stimuli in an experimental paradigm. You had to make design decisions in both studies to make the best of many limitations. What direction does the field need to move in to improve our ability to analyze truly interactional language with fewer limitations? What tools do we need in the toolbox?

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve as the external examiner on this dissertation. The work exceeds the standards required for a doctoral dissertation in both the quality of presentation and in its contribution to the field. I recommend the dissertation for public defense and unreservedly recommend the grade of PASS.

Respectfully submitted,

*Dr. Jennifer Hinnell*

April 30, 2021