



# Hearing Gesture: How Our Hands Help Us Think

*By Susan Goldin-Meadow*

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## **Hearing Gesture: How Our Hands Help Us Think** By Susan Goldin-Meadow

Many nonverbal behaviors--smiling, blushing, shrugging--reveal our emotions. One nonverbal behavior, gesturing, exposes our thoughts. This book explores how we move our hands when we talk, and what it means when we do so.

Susan Goldin-Meadow begins with an intriguing discovery: when explaining their answer to a task, children sometimes communicate different ideas with their hand gestures than with their spoken words. Moreover, children whose gestures do not match their speech are particularly likely to benefit from instruction in that task. Not only do gestures provide insight into the unspoken thoughts of children (one of Goldin-Meadow's central claims), but gestures reveal a child's readiness to learn, and even suggest which teaching strategies might be most beneficial.

In addition, Goldin-Meadow characterizes gesture when it fulfills the entire function of language (as in the case of Sign Languages of the Deaf), when it is reshaped to suit different cultures (American and Chinese), and even when it occurs in children who are blind from birth.

Focusing on what we can discover about speakers--adults and children alike--by watching their hands, this book discloses the active role that gesture plays in conversation and, more fundamentally, in thinking. In general, we are unaware of gesture, which occurs as an undercurrent alongside an acknowledged verbal exchange. In this book, Susan Goldin-Meadow makes clear why we must not ignore the background conversation.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

Susan Goldin-Meadow is the world's leading researcher into the cognitive meaning of gesture, and a beautiful writer as well. In this fascinating book, she shows us how gesture helps us think, remember, and learn, whether or not we're communicating anything to anyone else. Everybody gestures--she has told us why. (Annette Karmiloff-Smith, co-author, *Pathways to Language*)

*Hearing Gesture* is a treasure trove of observations and insights. A keen observer, witty writer, and remarkably creative experimenter, Goldin-Meadow focuses on our simplest and seemingly least consequential actions and draws from them a set of deep truths about the ways children and adults converse, think, and learn. (Elizabeth Spelke, Harvard University)

Goldin-Meadow offers a naturalistic study of gesture in children and adults that will convince the reader that gesture (as she defines it) is an inseparable part of speech, communication, and thought. Indeed, after reading this study one wonders whether the written word alone can really do the job of communicating. (M. W. York *Choice* 2004-04-01)

*Hearing Gesture* is an engaging (even suspenseful) read and, with its clear and informal style, should be largely accessible to non-experts...Readers will be impressed by [Goldin-Meadow's] extraordinary combination of thoughtful insight, experimental ingenuity and immense persistence and dedication to the search for knowledge...*Hearing Gesture* stands beside McNeill's *Hand and Mind* and *Language and Gesture* as a milestone in the study of gesture's relationship with language and thought. It may help to reshape the basic premises and methods of psychologists, linguists and other social scientists. (Eve Sweetser *Nature* 2004-06-10)

In *Hearing Gesture*, Susan Goldin-Meadow summarises 20 years of her own and others' research. She comments on topics that range from the gestural communication systems used by workers in sawmills, where noise prevents talk, and Trappist monks, whose vows preclude talk, to Australian aboriginal women silent while in mourning, and the gestural lingua franca of Plains Indians...*Hearing Gesture*...for the next decade will be the starting point for those interested in gesture. (Chris McManus *Times Higher Education Supplement* 2004-10-01)

#### Review

Susan Goldin-Meadow is the world's leading researcher into the cognitive meaning of gesture, and a beautiful writer as well. In this fascinating book, she shows us how gesture helps us think, remember, and learn, whether or not we're communicating anything to anyone else. Everybody gestures--she has told us why. (Annette Karmiloff-Smith, co-author, *Pathways to Language*)

#### About the Author

Susan Goldin-Meadow is the Irving B. Harris Professor of Psychology at the University of Chicago.

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