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Appreciation Report of the Doctoral Dissertation of Monika Boruta-Zywiczynska

Titled: Mind the gap! Sign function emergence in the second year of life and beyond

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First, thank you for the opportunity to review this work, from which I learned a lot.

This report will be organized briefly around the structure of the dissertation and its content and methodology.

Regarding the structure, "Mind the gap! Sign function emergence in the second year of Life and Beyond" adequately summarizes the main dimensions of work marked by child development regarding gesture.

The introduction reveals a good command of the context and critical concepts, approaching them briefly, organized and focused. The introduction also presents the hypotheses under study and the outline of the dissertation.

The dissertation is organized classically, around an introduction and four chapters, all well structured with an introduction, content, conclusion, and conclusions.

The chapters are organized logically, theoretically framing the various approaches addressed, language, linguistics, psycholinguistics, cognitive semiotics, and child development. This framework is done solidly, with references from current literature, but also living up to the seminal literature on the various topics covered.

The empirical work contains a significant research design, with a detailed methodology, the instruments used, the description of the sample (participants), and how the participants were recruited. All participants are volunteers with their parent's

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permission, as they are young children. Being a population ethically considered vulnerable, the authorization was given through the parents. The ethics committee (authorization form attached to the dissertation) approved the study, safeguarding the procedures for participating volunteers who meet the recommended ethical standards for this type of study.

The writing of the dissertation is of high quality, maintaining the academic tone and managing to make reading enjoyable, revealing an excellent command of English. It is impartial, affirmative writing – when it has to be – direct and efficient, presenting integrative syntheses at each step of the investigation and with well-founded arguments.

Another quality of the writing in this dissertation is the ability to summarize and interconnect concepts both in the theoretical framework and in the discussion of results.

Tables and photographs are necessary to understand the content and are indicated in lists (list of tables and pictures). As far as the tables are concerned, they are easy to read, show the values, have titles, and refer to the sources (author/page) in case they were taken from someone else. As far as the photographs are concerned, they work as aids for decoding the text and also reveal good graphic quality, with the identity of the participants being masked to protect privacy and comply with ethical standards for these procedures.

References are consistent with APA standards.

Concerning content and methodology, it can be said that this thesis brings a general theme of great relevance – the study of the gesture co-related with child development, taking into account an approach of cognitive semiotics. It is an approach that is part of the path of studies and work on gesture and pantomime at the center of language evolution research, a research center of excellence focusing in this work on the development of gesture in children.

This dissertation fulfills the proposed objectives through an experimental design that offers to answer three questions by formulating hypotheses.

The questions are (i) whether the understanding of signs and gestures changes in the age transition between 24 and 36 months, (ii) whether there is a difference between the understanding of different types of iconic gestures, (iii) whether children's ability to understand gestures and signs precedes the ability to understand linguistic signs.

All questions and hypotheses are correctly formulated, and the experimental design was carefully planned by answering the questions and verifying the formulated hypotheses.

The methodology used is described early in the introduction and detailed in Chapter 3 – research design. The phases of the work, the stimuli and their order, the instruments used (e.g., ECBQ, SES questionnaires as well as the annotation software, ELAN), the preparation of the participants and the verification of the material, the recruitment procedure, and the limitations are contemplated because this study was conducted in the period of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

The results are presented in Chapter 4, in the first phase regarding the quantitative analysis using the statistical software R, mixed models, and regressions. A qualitative and comprehensive analysis of results is presented in the second phase and the same chapter.

The dissertation is rich in data, based on the methodology used, crossing references from the theoretical framework and mobilizing new, emerging, and original knowledge on the proposed theme. There is in this dissertation the depth and complexity that make up a doctoral thesis.

The conclusions revisit the objectives, questions, and hypotheses, summarize the results obtained, and look forward to the future of this line of investigation.

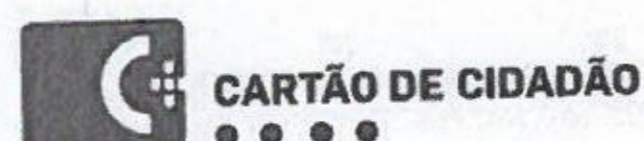
Based on the above, this dissertation can be submitted for public discussion and defense.

I offer my sincere congratulations to the author and candidate.

Lisbon, 6th July 2023,

Ana Mineiro

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