

Arnd Witte: Bringing the body into play:
The corporeal aspect in second language acquisition.

In: The Modern Language Journal Volume107, Issue 3, Autumn (Fall) 2023,
Pages 693-712. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/modl.12861>

Abstract

This article foregrounds the role of the learner's experienced and expressive body in the process of action-oriented intercultural second language acquisition (SLA), drawing on phenomenological and related research on embodiment. It suggests that processes of perception, cognition, intentionality, and action are fundamentally shaped by the preconscious experiences of the moving body and its real-time, unmediated interaction with affordances of the social, cultural, and material environment. The pre-reflective corporeal resonances and experiences provide foundational orientations and scaffoldings for perceptive, emotive, and cognitive processes, emerging through situated bodily activities. Thus, the explicit integration of learners' active bodies in SLA processes mobilizes largely untapped resources of embodied learning. Preconscious resonances with the second language and the cultural other can be directly sensed in, through, and with the body, allowing for spontaneous behavior to flow naturally in intercultural situations. By engaging the active body in SLA, elements of body memory, and not just episodic memory, are continually reenacted and actualized. The regular training of attentiveness to the corporeal resonances with and adaptive responses to the affordances in the SLA process serves to orientate and scaffold hermeneutical learning and to anchor it in learners' life experience.

KEYWORDS

action-oriented SLA, body memory, embodied semiosis, lived body, multimodal learning, somatic attentiveness