As one of the most important linguistic categories used to represent events in Chinese and English, grammatical aspect can reflect, and influence, speakers’ cognition of events. This thesis addresses the potential multimodality of grammatical aspect in event representation to investigate interrelations between grammar, gesture and cognition. Adapting qualitative and quantitative corpus-analytical methodologies, the study systematically examines native Chinese speakers’ native English speakers’ and high-intermediate L1-Chinese L2-English foreign language learners’ multimodal representations of aspectual distinctions while thinking, speaking and gesturing about events in natural conversations.

A first study shows how the Chinese aspectual distinctions at the macro- as well as micro-levels relate to gestural representations. A second study reports the differences among Chinese perfective vs. imperfective aspect on concrete, abstract-metaphoric and inherently abstract events via co-speech gestures. A third and a fourth study reveal that co-speech gestures show correlations with the different meanings of polysemous Chinese imperfective aspectual and English progressive aspectual forms. In addition, a foreign language developmental study on multimodal representation of progressive aspect demonstrates that L1-Chinese L2-English speakers mainly maintain their L1 thinking-for-speaking patterns, whereas they have developed mixed L1-L2 gestural patterns.

This thesis furthers our understanding of the relation between grammar, gesture and (event) cognition, suggesting that grammatical aspect has the potential to be multimodal and embodied, and that it plays a role not only in how we speak about events, but also in how we gesture about them.