

Crossroads between Gesture, Sign, and Language: The Palm-Up in the management of spoken and signed interaction in French-speaking Belgium.

Alysson LEPEUT

University of Namur & F.R.S.-FNRS
[alysson.lepeut@unamur.be]

Abstract. This paper lies at the gesture-sign interface. It aims at discussing the implications of approaching the concept of *gesture* through the contrastive multimodal analysis within and across two modalities and languages in French-speaking Belgium, namely, French Belgian Sign Language (LSFB) and spoken French (BF), of a shared gesture: the Palm-Up (PU). One particularity about PU is that, unlike content-oriented gestures, PU is “interactional in nature” (Cooperrider et al. 2018, p. 5). The current focus is on how PU participates in the management of signed interaction, and how its uses compare to those used in spoken interaction. Previous work has shown that PU’s *interactive* functions include – but are not limited to – regulating turn-taking, marking new or shared information, acknowledging and eliciting shared understanding through feedback. Yet, these interactional components in gesture and sign language conversation remain understudied. The objectives are: (i) to study PU frequency; (ii) to investigate its interactive functions and (iii) to examine if specific gaze directions (e.g. addressed or floating) co-occur with some PUs and/or functions. Annotation and analysis of approximately 3 hours of video-recorded material were conducted. The data are drawn from (1) The CorpAGEst Corpus with 4 speakers (≥ 75 y. old) recorded in semi-directed interviews at their home; (2) The LSFB Corpus including dyadic conversations of 2 pairs of signers (≥ 66 y. old) recorded in the university lab; and (3) The FRAPé Corpus composed of 2 pairs of speakers (≥ 66 y. old) collected in the university lab as well. Comparing data from (2) and (3) allowed conducting the first multimodal cross-linguistic study between LSFB and BF. One strength in this approach is that such comparison implies two facets: “commonalities of gesture and sign resulting from a shared medium of expression”, on the one hand, and “commonalities resulting from language use within and across language communities”, on the other (Müller 2018, p.15). Preliminary results suggest that PU is extremely multifunctional in nature, which echoes McKee and Wallingford’s previous study (2011). We found that all participants use PU to manage interaction, but they do it for different communicative purposes. While some interactive functions overlap, signers use PUs especially to regulate their turn-taking system and to provide feedback. Speakers, however, use it for marking new or shared information. In line with other researchers (Müller 2018), this study shows how putting gesture and sign on common ground favors commonalities between them, and how examining an interactive gesture in a signed and spoken language reinforces the argument for gesture as part of linguistic activities, and as to what it means for spoken and signed languages to be *gestural languages*.

Keywords: Sign Language, Gesture, Multimodal Corpora, Social Interaction, Pragmatics

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