

Surprise!

Gestures in Italian and Italian Sign Language (LIS) expressing surprise and surprise-disapproval

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Theoretical Questions

- ❖ Are counter-expectational and surprise-disapproval questions in LIS characterized by a peculiar intonation?
- ❖ Are counter-expectational and surprise-disapproval questions in LIS characterized by a peculiar gestural pattern?
- ❖ Are there manual co-speech gesture along with signs?
- ❖ What is the syntactic representation of these structures in LIS?

Abstract

In this work I argue in favor of an integrated model of syntax, prosody and gesture in Italian Sign Language (LIS) for two kinds of special questions: counter-expectational and surprise-disapproval questions. I capitalize on work by Giorgi & Dal Farra (2018) on oral languages and consider the interaction of these three components in LIS, a language realizing prosody by means of a different modality (non-manual components), paying attention also to the presence of **gestures** accompanying **signs**. Furthermore, in order to investigate the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural nature of the gestural component, I conducted a pilot study on the realization of the same sentences in non-western languages: Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese.

Background

Counter-expectational and surprise-disapproval QS

Dal Farra & Giorgi (2018); Giorgi & Dal Farra (2019); Dal Farra, Giorgi & Hinterhölzl (to appear):

- **Prosody**
 - The **distribution of pitches**: the most common is a pitch on the verbal form, which is an emphatic pitch crucially different from contrastive accents and other focus accents.
 - The prosody differs from the ones of neutral questions

- **Gesture**
 - **Counter-expectational surprise questions**
 - PUOH manual gesture (Palm-Up Open Hand, Kendon 2004);
 - raised and/or furrowed brows;
 - movement of the head



PUOH gesture. From Giorgi, Dal Farra, 2019, Fig. 2

- **Surprise-disapproval questions**
 - PUOH, artichoke or Hands in Prayer manual gestures → all iterated;
 - furrowed brows;
 - movement of the head



Respectively, PUOH, artichoke, Hands in Prayer iterated gestures; from Giorgi, Dal Farra, 2019 Fig. 9, 10

- **Alignment**
 - **Alignment between prosody and gesture**: the stroke of the hand gesture, and of the nod of the head, is realized in correspondence with the nuclear pitch of the verbal form.
 - **The input to the sensorimotor component for prosody and gesture realization is unique**, i.e. that they both are triggered by the same syntactic property, i.e. **the left peripheral Evaluative head** – a prosody/gesture-oriented head in the sense of Giorgi (2014) – which has scope on the whole sentence.

- **Syntactic Properties (Giorgi 2016; 2018)**:
 - Introduced by **ma (but)**, which qualifies as a **discourse head**;
 - In the scope of an **evaluative head**;

[_{DIS} [_{CP1} ...] [_{DIS} ma [_{EVAL} [_{WH} [_{CP2} non mangiavi solo frutta]]]]

[_{DIS} [_{CP1} ...] [_{DIS} ma [_{EVAL} [_{WH} che [_{CP2} fai]]]]]

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Methods and Materials

1. The data

Counter-expectational surprise Qs

Context

I know that you are on a diet and decided to eat only fruit. One day I see you eating a big hamburger. I am **SURPRISED** and utter:

- (1) Ma non mangiavi solo frutta?
But not eat-imp-2p only fruit?
'But weren't you eating only fruit?'

Surprise-disapproval Qs

Context

I see Gianni wearing his best trousers kneeling in the dirt in the garden. I think he will ruin his trousers. I am **ANNOYED** and utter:

- (2) Ma cosa fai?
But what (you) do-pres-2ps
'But what are you doing?'

2. Experiments 1 & 2 (LIS; Korean, Vietnamese, Japanese)

- **Sample**: two native Italian/LIS bilingual consultants (pilot work) (Exp. 1); three native speakers (pilot work) (Exp. 2)
- **Elicitation task**: I read 5 specific contexts meant to introduce counter-expectational/surprise-disapproval value. After each context the signer was asked to sign an appropriate sentence as a reaction to that context. The only instruction was: 'Sign it in the most natural way'. This task was proposed only to signers.
- **Repetition task**: I read 5 specific contexts meant to introduce counter-expectational/surprise-disapproval value. After each context, the signer/speaker was presented with the sentence she had to produce. The sentences were presented in a written form (Italian) without punctuation, to do not suggest a particular prosodic contour. The only instruction was: 'Sign/Say it in the most natural way'. In the case of non-western languages, the task has been previously discussed with native speaker consultants. They also translated the target sentences proposed, judging them as appropriate to the same contexts in their languages as well.
- **Procedure**: The consultants were video-taped, and the resulting videos have been annotated with ELAN. In the case of the speakers, the audio files have been extracted and annotated with Praat and the ToBI system.

Results (1)

Context

You know that your friend Gianni is on a diet and decided to eat only fruit. One day you see him eating a big hamburger. You are **SURPRISED** and sign:

- (3) (IX_{2p}) MANGIARE PANINO
(Tu) mangi un panino?
'Are you eating that sandwich?'

(Elicitation task)



Fig.1 Counter-expectational Qs (LIS)

VS

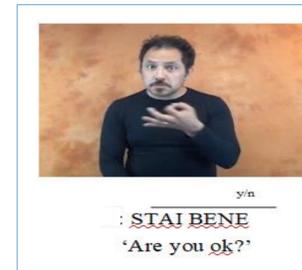


Fig.2 Neutral yes/no Qs; from <https://www.spreadthesign.com/it.it/search/08/07/19>

Context

You see your brother wearing his best trousers kneeling in the dirt in the garden. You think that he will ruin his trousers. You are **ANNOYED** and sign:

- (5) NO IX-loc artichoke SPORCO IX-loc
No (ma che fai) è sporco li?
'No (what are you doing?) it's dirty?'

(Repetition task)



Fig.3 Surprise-disapproval Qs (LIS)

VS



Fig.3 a Neutral content Qs; from <https://www.spreadthesign.com/it.it/search/08/07/19> "QUANDO?"

Co-occurrence of values

Context I

You know that your friend Gianni is on a diet and decided to eat only fruit. One day you see him eating a big hamburger. You are **SURPRISED** and sign

- (1) IX_{2p} DIRE (MANGIARE) SOLO FRUTTA
'Did not you tell me that you only eat fruit?'

(Elicitation task)



Fig.4 Counter-expectational yes/no questions + disapproval value (LIS)

↔



Fig.5 Artichoke gesture produced in the same context after the sign in Fig. 4



Fig. 6 Hands in Prayer gesture (LIS)

Fig. 7 Artichoke gesture (LIS)

Context	Furrowed eyebrows; squinted eyes; neutral mouth	Raised brows; widened eyes; lips downwards	Furrowed brows; lips downwards; neutral eyes	Artichoke	Hands in Prayer
Surprise-Disapproval Qs (10)	100%		60%	20%	
C/E Surprise Qs (10)	50%				
C/E Surprise Qs with disapproval value		50%	30%	20%	

Conclusions

- Peculiar prosodic contour: **emphatic raised brows, widened eyes, corner of the lips downwards** (counter-expectational Qs); **emphatic furrowed brows, squinted eyes, neutral mouth** (surprise-disapproval Qs). In non-western languages, these structures present a peculiar fading intonation.
- The maximum extension of facial expression in LIS is **aligned** with the nuclear syllable of the verbal form (I only textured monosyllabic verbs) and with the movement of the head (which has no morphological neither syntactical function in these cases). In non-western languages the only gestures found are raised eyebrows and movement of the head. These gesture turn out to be aligned with the introductory particle in most of the cases.
- **Two of the three manual co-speech gestures** found in oral languages are present in LIS as well. These gestures are not part of the preceding sentence, in that the signal of the end of the intonational units are present (before the gesture): changing in the gaze direction, head position and facial expression (which is less emphatic). They neither do not take part of the following intonational unit. Moreover they are not recognized lexemes and are not used as classifiers. It is plausible to hypothesize that their are actual co-speech gesture.
- **The presence of the non-manual marking (regularly activated in timing, onset and duration) on the entire sentence** in LIS is compatible with the syntactic model proposed by Giorgi (2018) for oral languages. The non-manual marking start from the left periphery - triggered by the Eval projection - and take in its scope all the sentence.

Future Directions

- ❖ **How linguistic and paralinguistic functions interact in signed languages?**
- Sign languages exploit the same visual signals available to speakers (Dachkovsky, Sandler 2009) organizing them into a **prosodic system** (e.g., Wilbur, 1991, 2000, for American Sign Language; Nespou & Sandler, 1999, and Sandler, 1999a, 1999b, for Israeli Sign Language; van der Kooij, Crasborn, & Emmerik, 2006, for Sign Language of the Netherlands).
- As in spoken communication (Keltner, Ekman, Gonzaga, Beer 2003) these visual signals convey also **paralinguistic meaning** (Campbell, Woll, Benson, Wallace 1999; McCullough, Emmorey, Sereno 2005).
- ❖ **Are there invariants in the facial configurations expressing basic emotions?**
- 'Primary emotions' are considered universally expressed in similar ways in Psychology (Ekman 1973; 1993; 1999; Izard 1994; Frijda 1986). I will investigate systematically the expression of surprise and disapproval in sign and non-western oral languages in the same constructions mentioned above. I will conduct a systematic research on the production of monolingual native speakers using the FACS system to annotate the facial muscles implied.

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