

# PA7.1 – Imperatives and imperative speech acts in sign languages

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## I. The form-meaning mismatch

- In spoken languages, the imperative form can be used to express different but related speech acts [2]:
  - Stand at attention! → Command
  - Don't touch the hot plate! → Warning
  - Take your pills daily! → Advice
  - Please, give me money! → Plea
- Since the different usages lack a clear morpho-syntactic marking, imperative constructions in spoken languages are an example of a zero-to-one form-meaning mismatch.
- In sign language (SLs), imperatives are marked in two dimensions [1], [3]. By the use of ...
  - specific manual markers (signs, MMs)
  - specific non-manual markers (NMMs) such as facial expressions, head movements, and body movements.

### Empirical questions

- How are imperative speech acts marked in German (DGS) and Greek Sign Language (GSL)?
- Do we find morphosyntactic evidence for an (uniform) independent imperative sentence type?

### Theoretical questions

- How can imperatives in SLs be analyzed at the interface between syntax, semantics and pragmatics?
- What is the function of NMMs in SL imperatives?

## II. Methodology & hypotheses

- Controlled picture elicitation task + discussions with informants
- Check of specific signs in the DGS corpus [4]
- Annotation of NMMs: Facial Action Coding System (FACS)



Verbal stimulus  
HELP (GSL)



Pictorial stimulus  
Fireman

Combine the verb with the picture and produce:

- Assertions
- Commands
- Pleas
- Permissions

Repeat with  
negation

### Expectations

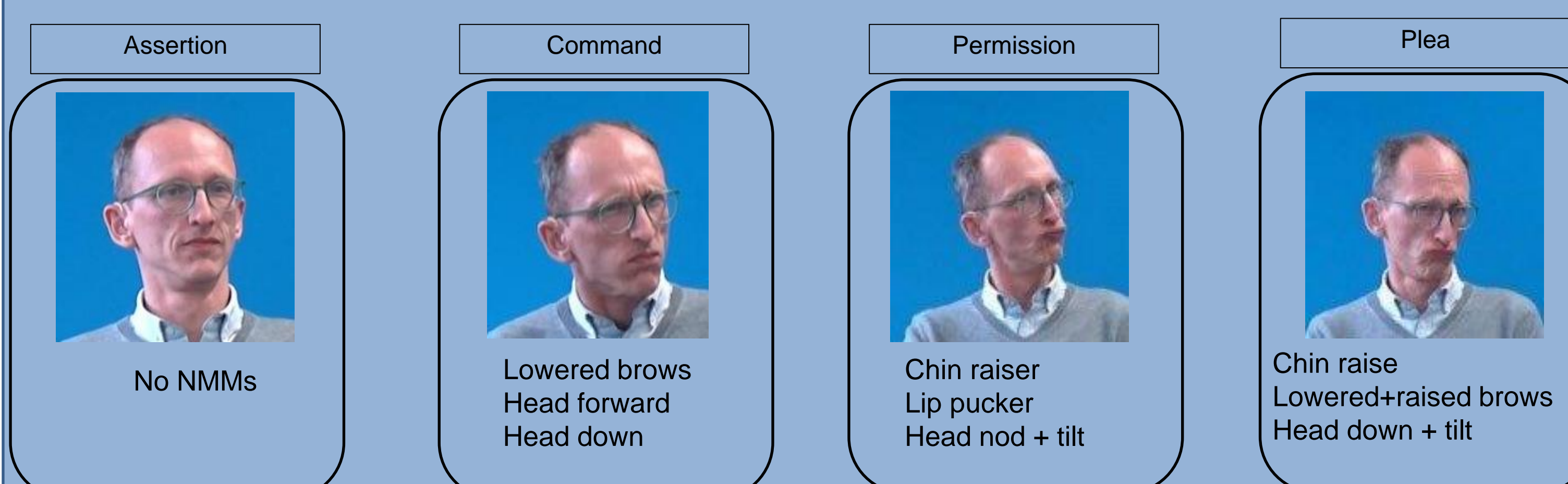
- Specific manual and non-manual elements are used to mark imperative sentence types and/or imperative speech acts
- Due to iconicity effects, overlap wrt. non-manual marking in DGS and GSL
- Different manual negator in imperatives vs. declaratives, similarly to some spoken languages [5]

## III. Results & discussion

Morphosyntactically imperatives (2) are like declaratives (1) but differ wrt. the NMMs:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (1) FIREFIGHTER HELP<br>'I help the firefighter.' | (2) FIREFIGHTER HELP<br>'Help the firefighter!' |
|---|---|

- Specific clusters of NMMs** are used to mark different imperative speech acts (command, plea, permission)
- Not a single NMM (e.g., lowered brows) that appears systematically in all imperative speech acts



**NMMs:** Occur in imperatives and declaratives

**Negation:** No distinguished manual negator

Same NMMs in affirmatives + NMMs of negation

**Subjects:** True subjects, not restricted to second person

- MNMMs → **Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices**, they modify the illocutionary force of the sentence. They behave like intonation or modal particles in spoken languages.
- Manual markers → grammaticalized signs with a specific function as **Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices**.
- Imperative speech acts in SLs are morphosyntactically similar to declaratives, but are marked by different MMs and NMMs that mark different imperative speech acts → **not a core underlying sentence types** like in many spoken languages
- Form-meaning mismatch → one form that is used to express different imperative meanings that are distinguished by signed prosody and by specific grammaticalized MMs.

## IV. Consequences and follow-up questions

- What is the function of NMMs cross-linguistically and across modalities? Are they used and perceived in the same way by deaf signers and hearing speakers (co-speech gestures) indicating universal cognitive properties?
- What are the exact conditions of licensing null subjects in general?
- These questions will be investigated for spoken languages by the 2<sup>nd</sup> cohort (PA7.2) and for SLs by the 3<sup>rd</sup> cohort (PA7.3).