

A point well taken: The non-first person category in Sign Language of the Netherlands



Martine Zwets

(with Emar Maier & Kees de Schepper)



Person in Signed Languages

- *A Language Universal*

Person in
signed
languages

Outline

Non-first
person

Imperatives

Non-
addressee
oriented
imperatives

Conclusions

“First person = speaker; second person = spoken to; third person = neither speaker nor spoken to”
(Jespersen 1924)

“Universal 42: All languages have pronominal categories involving at least three persons and two numbers.” (Greenberg 1963)



Person in Signed Languages

- Reference and pointing

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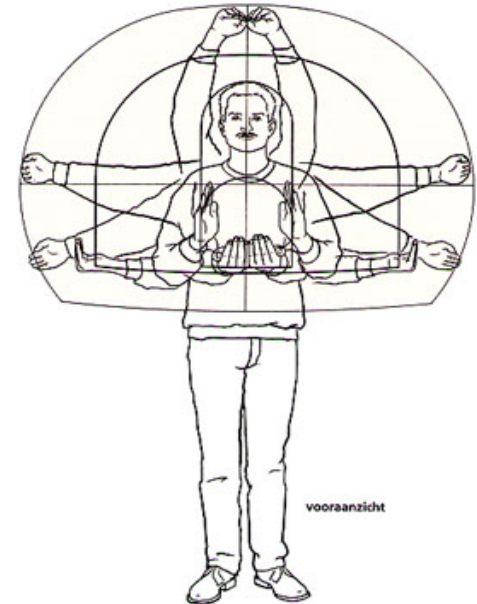
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- Speaker ('I')
- Addressee ('you')
- Non-addressed participant (deictic 'he')
- Non-present reference by prior localization (anaphoric 'he')



Spoken language

- 1-2-3 person distinction
- Singular versus plural



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- Reference and pointing

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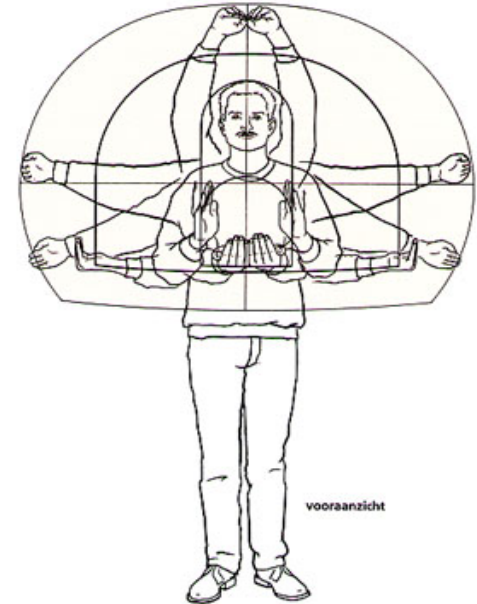
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- Person in sign language: three approaches
 - Berenz: 1 vs 2 vs 3
 - Meier: 1 vs 2=3
 - Liddell: 1=2=3

- Non-addressee oriented imperatives in NGT
 - 2=3 → “3rd person imperatives”



Non-first person

- *The body coordinates model*

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- Berenz, 2002; Alibasic & Wilbur, 2006
- First versus Non-First
 - Body-anchored verbs (e.g. LOOK-AT)
 - First person in Role Shift
- Second versus Third?

'You'	
Feature	Aligned
Gaze	√
Head	√
Hand	√

'He'	
Feature	Aligned
Gaze	√
Head	√
Hand	...



Non-first person

- *First vs. Non-first*

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- Meier (1990)
- Grammar: first versus non-first
- Pragmatics: look at addressee (Baker 1977)

→ Alignment of coordinates

→ Prediction: cancelable



“Can’t you see I’m busy?”



Imperatives

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Meier, Liddell, ...

→ 2=3

→ Imperatives?



Imperatives

- Imperatives in sign language

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“In ASL the **subject is often deleted** or occurs after the verb [...] ASL imperatives also have particular nonmanual signals [...] possibly **frowning.**”

(Valli & Lucas 1992)





Imperatives

- *Imperatives in sign language*

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Syntactic features

- Deleted subject

Emphasis

- Speed
- Heavy, accentuated signing

Non-manual marking

- Frowning
- Squint
- Wrinkled nose
- Inclined head

Particles

- COME ON
- GO AHEAD
- GO ON



Imperatives

- *Imperatives in sign language*

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Syntactic features

➤ Deleted subject

[Private clip]

WATCH OUT
'Watch out!'



Imperatives

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[Private clip]

NOW START EAT
'Start eating now!'



Imperatives

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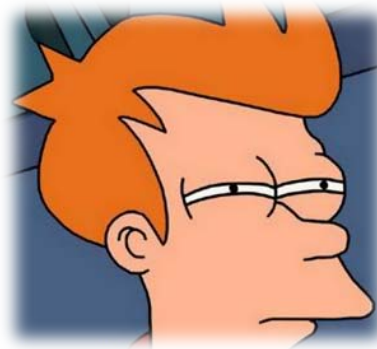
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Non-addressee oriented imperatives

- *In spoken language*

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- Spoken imperatives are restricted to 2nd person.

Counter-examples?

- **Nobody move!** (Schwager 2005)



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- ~~Nobody move!~~
- **Let him do the dishes!**

Imperative = imperative meaning + imperative morphology



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- ~~Nobody move!~~

- ~~Let him do the dishes!~~

- **Laat hem het zelf maar oplossen!**

let him it self solve

- **Laat hij het zelf maar oplossen!**

let he it self solve

(Mastop 2005)

- In SL: Non-addressee oriented imperative



Non-addressee oriented imperatives

- *Prediction for sign language*

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Kim and Ruby are friends and are talking to each other. Kim had a date, but afterwards the boy didn't call. She's unsure about it and asks Ruby. Ruby tries to calm her down and says that he might not have had the time to call or has had other things to do.

Kim says: 'Whatever! Let he apologize! With some flowers!'

[Private clip]

BYE IF o-COME-s FLOWERS o-GIVE-s APOLOGIES o-GIVE-s
*'Whatever! If he comes, let he give flowers and apologize'



Non-addressee oriented imperatives

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Pete runs to John and says: 'have you heard?! Frank has quit his job and now wants to make a trip around the world on a unicycle! John sighs and says: 'Let he act normal, that's crazy enough!'

[Private clip]

CRAZY pu NORMAL DO pu
*‘Crazy! Let he act normal!’



Non-addressee oriented imperatives

- *Prediction for sign language*

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Two days later, John sees Frank. Frank enthusiastically starts telling that he is planning to make a trip around the world. John interrupts him and says: 'Yes, I've heard that: Act normal, that's crazy enough!'

[Private clip]

CRAZY pu NORMAL DO pu

'Crazy! Act normal!'



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- Sign language does not grammaticalize the 2nd-3rd distinction
- Evidence: non-addressee oriented morphological imperatives in NGT
- **Three person universal refuted?**

Special thanks to

Signers:

Johan Ros

Yassine Nauta

Merel van Zuilen

Student-assistant:

Peia Prawiro-Admodjo

local.pronouns@gmail.com