

Counterfactual Imperatives across Modalities

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Introduction

Counterfactual imperatives (a.k.a. **reproachatives**) convey a **reprimand** directed at a second person with a **counterfactual** reading.

• **Interpretation:** from the speaker's perspective, the addressee had a reasonably good opportunity to have taken an alternative course of action that would have led us to a better world. The fact that the addressee failed to take this course of action is seen by the speaker as particularly unwise or unreasonable. (Vicente 2013)

• **Morphosyntactic instantiations:**

a) Infinitival perfect **imperatives**

(1) Haber venido ayer!
have.INF come.PTCP yesterday
'You should have come yesterday.'

[Peninsular Spanish]

b) Transparent **imperatives** in PA

(2) kunt 2iStri sayyara jdiidi
be.PST.2M buy.IMP.2M car.F new.F
'You should have bought a new car.'

[Palestinian Arabic]

However, not everyone agrees on their semantic nature:

- **Imperatives** (Vicente 2013)
- **Optatives** (Biezma 2013)
- **Hybrid** between the two (van Olmen 2018)

Reproachatives are realized as imperatives in a set of languages that have clearly grammaticalized this use. Arguments for imperative analysis (Bosque 1980, Vicente 2013).

Reprimands in sign?

- Catalan Sign Language (LSC) features the imperative form (different from modal statement to express a reproach).

(3) 2-WARN-1 BEFORE!
'You should have warned me before.'

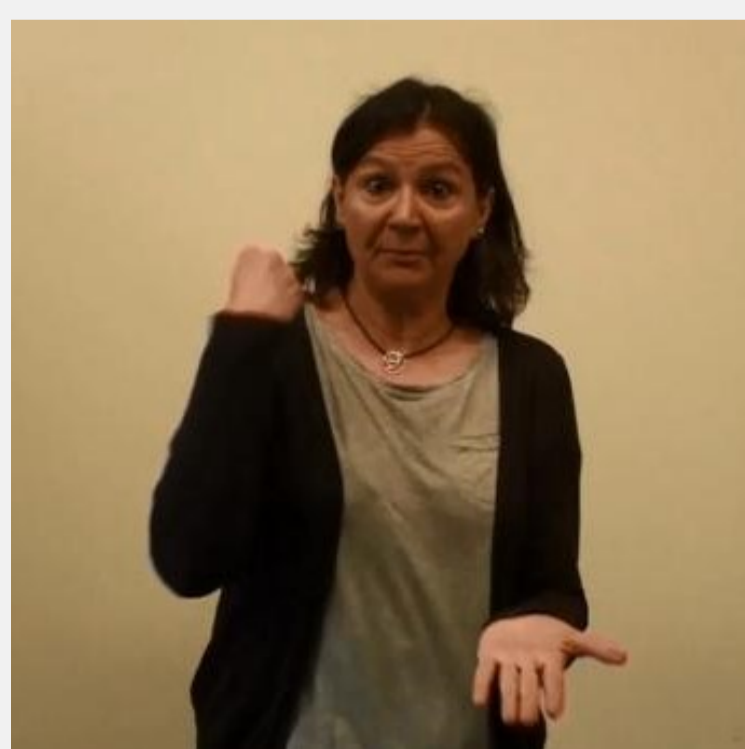
[LSC]

- Imperative-and-Declarative as litmus test for imperativehood (von Fintel & Iatridou 2015, Donati et al. 2017).

(4) Say one more word and I'll leave!

- Marking is different from conditionals and optatives:

- ✓ Conditionals: raised eyebrows, no tense and short movement



- ✓ Optatives: overt marking with I-WISH



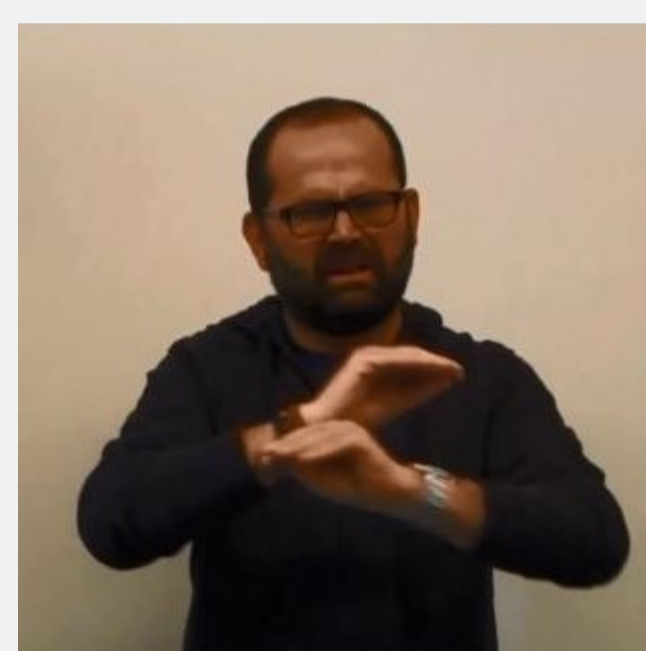
Results

- LSC turns out to display reproachatives that essentially have the formal properties of **imperatives** (cf. Donati et al 2017). LSC thus reinforces the empirical link between reproachatives and imperatives.

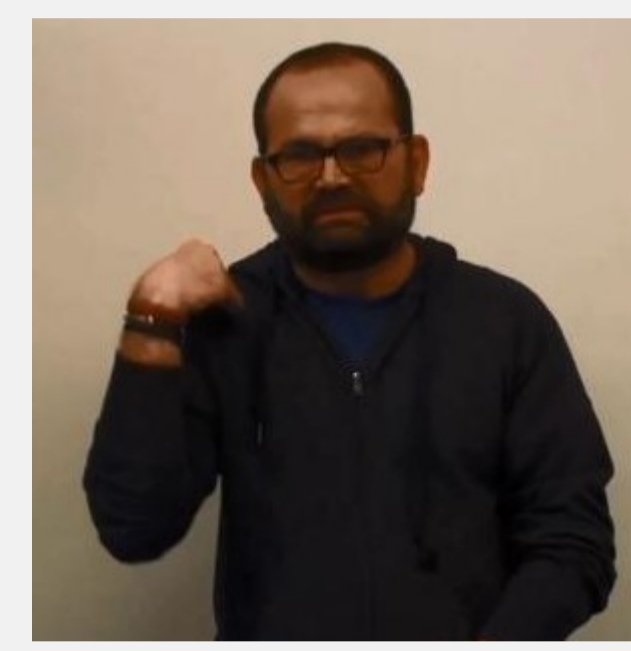
- **Counterfactuality** is not encoded with past or perfect morphology (rather with lexical past temporal adverbs sometimes).

• **Marking:**

- Non-manuals: Furrowed eyebrows



Imperative (command)
WARN.3PL 'Warn them!'



CI
2-WARN-1 (ex. (2))

- Prosody: tense, short movement of manual signs

• **Manual signs:**

- BEFOREabsolute, BEFOREanaphoric
- FIRST
- BETTER

• **Accompanying expressives:**

- MAN!
- YOU-SEE!



MAN!

- No past or perfect morphology in LSC, but (optional) past adverbs.

- Counterfactual imperatives can be combined with future adverbials, despite talking about a possibility in the past:

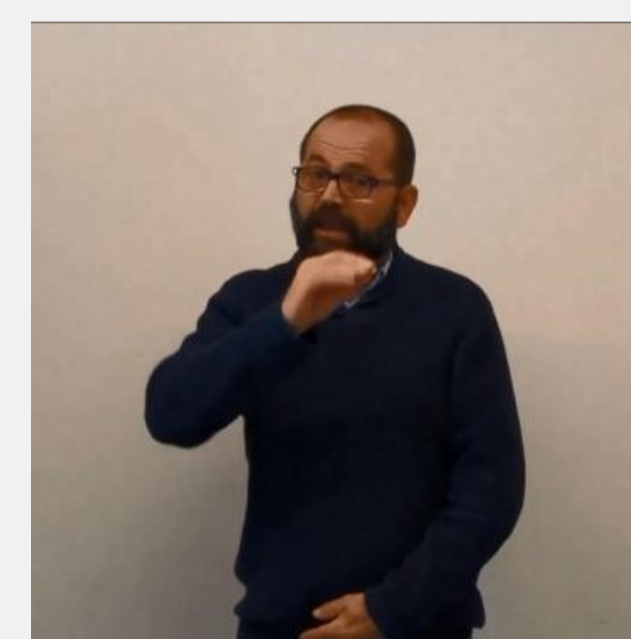
(5) BETTER BUY TOMORROW!
'You should have bought it tomorrow.'

- Counterfactual imperatives, like regular imperatives, can occur in an Imperative-and-Declarative structure:

(6) BEFORE 2-WARN-1, 1-HELP-2 SURE
'You should have told me and I would have helped you for sure.'

- Modal statements conveying a reproach in LSC feature formally different properties from counterfactual imperatives:

(7) MUST 2-WARN-3 BEFORE
'You should have warned them before.'



2-WARN-3

Getting the interpretation

- **Interpretation directly follows from combining:**

- Imperative semantics
- Counterfactual semantics

- From the **semantics of imperatives:**

- **possibility presupposition:**

the hearer has to know that a better choice is/was available: $\diamond p$

- **pragmatic presupposition:**

the result of carrying out the imperative is good / rewarding (Veltman 2009)

- From the **semantics of counterfactuals:**

- **counterfactual presupposition** : $\diamond p \sqsubset \text{KNOWLEDGE}$, i.e., it has to be common ground that this better choice was not taken, i.e. incompatible with what one takes to be knowledge.

- Addressee Wants p, PAST possible p, but NOT p.

- The reproach amounts to the fact that the speaker tries to make the addressee accept that a **good and available possibility** with a rewarding outcome has just become **unavailable**, therefore the actual negative consequences.

- But it would not work if we were to assume the optative, speaker-oriented bouletic, analysis for reproachatives: it is the addressee's wish, or both the speaker/signer and addressee's, but not the speaker/signer's alone, what grounds the reproach.

Conclusions

- **Counterfactual imperatives** are a well identified class in typologically unrelated languages, also in LSC

- Despite the crosslinguistic rarity of specialized reproachatives, its identification in a sign language argues for its uniqueness.

- Used to convey **reproaches**

- Interpretation derivable from the combined semantics of **imperativity** and **counterfactuality**

- Need to be distinguished from alternative modal constructions with priority modals or optatives (the only available strategies in languages like English)

Some open issues

- Is the existence of counterfactual imperatives in LSC the result of contact with Spanish or Catalan?

- Does Spanish Sign Language (LSE) have it?

- Does it occur in other SLs?

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