

What has COME become?

A corpus-based study into its grammatical functions in NGT

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Introduction & Definitions

- The verb **COME** is multifunctional in Sign Language of the Netherlands (NGT). The lexical meaning is associated with a change of location. This study shows that the sign has gained some grammatical functions as well: it has become a **Future Tense (FT)** marker and a **Change-of-State (CoS)** marker.
 - **Grammaticalization** is characterised by a loss of lexical meaning, lexical function and morphosyntactic properties, by gaining a grammatical function, and (often) by phonological reduction. A **gram** is a grammatical morpheme [4]. Previously documented examples of grammaticalization in sign languages are:
NGT verb GO.TO → auxiliary ACT.ON [1] and perhaps a FT marker GO [6] (see discussion);
ASL verb GO.TO → FT marker FUTURE [2]
- Although grammaticalization of 'to come' is quite frequent in spoken languages [3], it has, to my knowledge, **not yet been described for a sign language**. This is also the first description of a CoS marker in NGT.

Research questions

1. What are the grammaticalized functions of COME?
2. What is the sentence position of the gram COME?
3. What are the phonological forms of the gram COME?

Methodology

The Corpus NGT [5] was used to obtain data. We focused on the form in Figure 1, but other forms (with the same gloss) were studied as well. In total, 20% of the search hits (104/528 hits) was analyzed.

Results

1. COME has grammaticalized into a FT marker (ex. 1+2) and a CoS marker (ex. 3+4). Some examples are ambiguous (ex. 5+6).
2. The gram COME usually precedes the predicate (ex. 1-5), but sometimes it appears in sentence-final position (ex. 6). The lexical verb COME adheres to the basic word orders SVO&SOV.
3. The form as shown in Fig. 1 can appear one- or two-handed. No specific non-manual signals are associated, except for the mouthing *kom* 'come'. Other forms have a different handshape and have not gained these grammatical functions (but see discussion).

Examples

1. **COME SPREAD** [clip 723, S34]
'It will spread.'
2. **COME DEAF IX_{3,PL} SELF LEARN DEAF TEACHER SELF IX₃** [clip 97, S1]
'It will be the case that the deaf will teach the deaf.'
3. **FINALLY DRIVE.MOTOR COME RAIN** [clip 319, S15]
'I could finally drive my motor, but then it started to rain.'
4. **IF (...) HEARING PARENTS IX₁₊₃ COME PREGNANT DEAF (...)** [clip 132, S8]
'If hearing parents become pregnant with a deaf child...'
5. **IX₁ EXPECT COME IX₃ INTENSE FAST.SIGNING INTENSE** [clip 726, S34]
'I expect they will become very fluent signers.'
6. **IF CONTACT JUMP ELECTRICITY COME** [clip 1839, S76]
'If he contacts [the cables], he will be electrocuted.'

References: [1] Bos, H. 1994. An auxiliary verb in Sign Language of the Netherlands. In Ahlgren, I., B. Bergman & M. Brennan (eds.), Perspectives on sign language structure. Papers from the Fifth International Symposium on Sign Language Research. Durham: International Sign Linguistics Association, 37-53. [2] Janzen, T. 2012. Lexicalization and grammaticalization. In Pfau, R., M. Steinbach & B. Woll (eds.), Sign language: An international handbook. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 816-841. [3] Heine, B. & T. Kuteva. 2002. World Lexicon of grammaticalization. New York, USA: Cambridge University Press. [4] Bybee, J., R. Perkins & W. Pagliuca. The evolution of grammar: Tense, aspect and modality in the languages of the world. Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press. [5] Crasborn, O., I. Zwitserlood & J. Ros. 2008. Het Corpus NGT. Een digitaal open access-corpus van filmpjes en annotaties van de Nederlandse Gebarentaal. Centre for Language Studies, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen. URL: <http://www.ru.nl/corpusngt>. [6] Couvee, S. & R. Pfau. 2018. Structure and grammaticalization of Serial Verb Constructions in Sign Language of the Netherlands: A corpus-based study. Frontiers in Psychology 9:993. [7] Boven, C. van. 2019. The marking of imperatives in Sign Language of the Netherlands. MA thesis, University of Amsterdam.

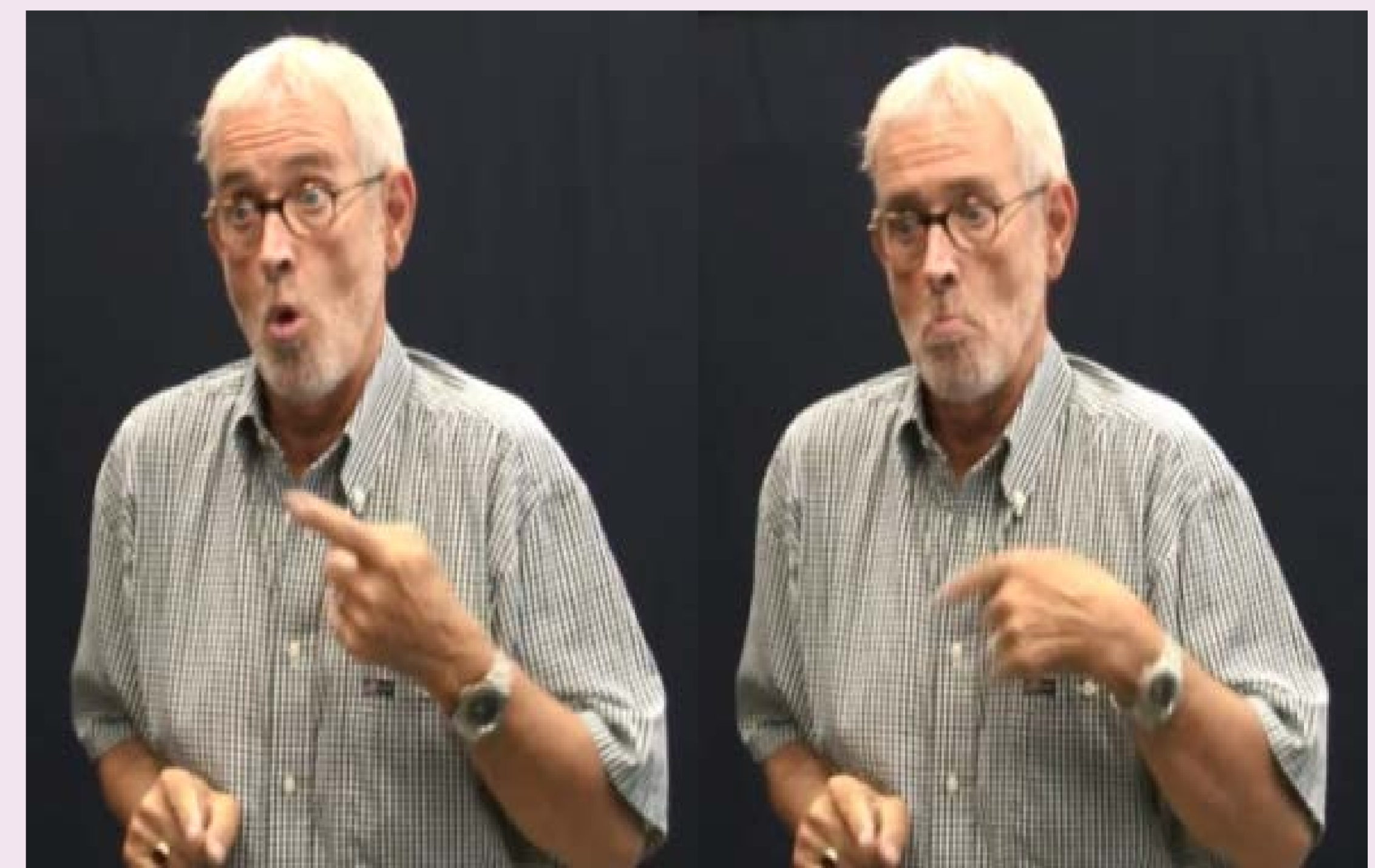


Figure 1. The NGT sign COME (one-handed)

Discussion & Conclusion

- The grammaticalization of COME is for the first time described for a sign language. As is commonly the case, not all characteristics apply: there is no phonological reduction, and the lexical meaning still exists.
- Generally, emergence of the FT marker follows the CoS marker [3]. It is unknown if this is the case for NGT, since the data are not suitable to test diachronic hypotheses.
- Interestingly, a related form (see Fig. 2) has the function of an imperative marker [7]. This sign has followed another grammaticalization path.
- After re-analysis, the gram GO does not seem to function as an FT marker - contra [6]. Therefore, the relationship between COME and GO was not further studied.



Figure 2. The imperative gram COME