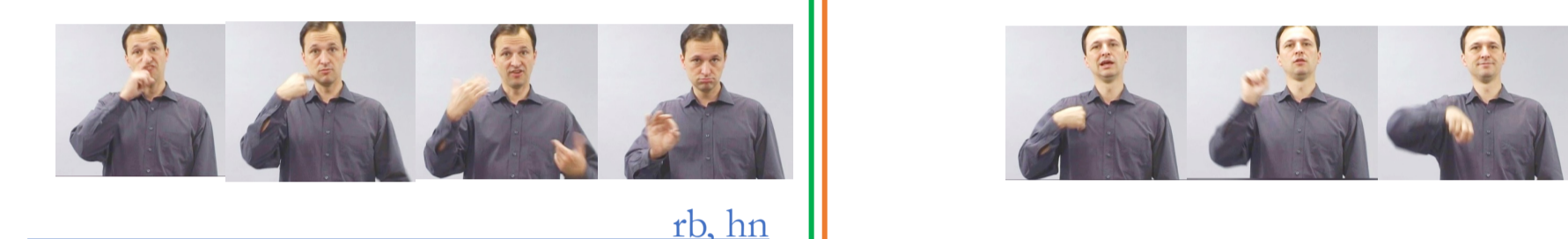# Conditional clauses in German Sign Language (DGS) and Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) - A comparison
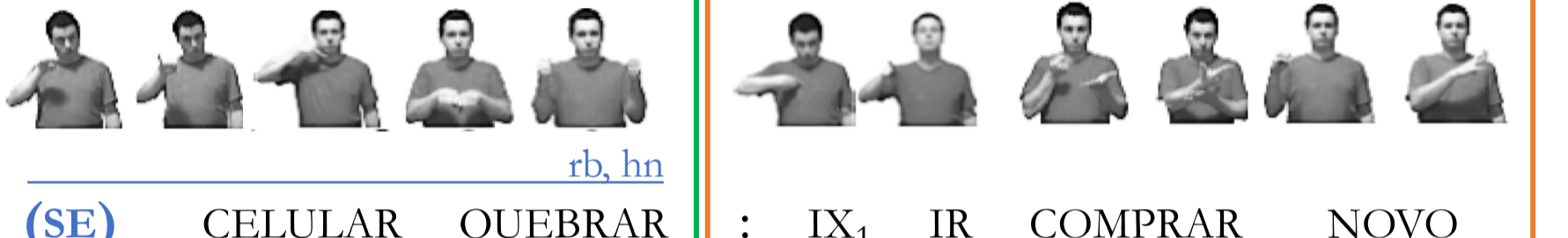
1. Theoretical background

„A conditional sentence is a sentence consisting of two clauses, one of which (the antecedent) expresses a condition whose fulfillment or non-fulfillment is relevant to the degree of reality assigned to the other (the consequent)."
(Quer et al. 2017:462-463)

They are subordinated clauses which form a relatively new field in sign language syntax (Baker & Padden 1978, Liddell 1986, Tang & Lau 2013, Herrmann & Steinbach 2013) and require a combination of nonmanual and, often optionally, manual signs.

(1)	**(WENN)** MORGEN WETTER GUT	:	**(DANN)** IX₁ DRAUSSEN SPAZIER	(DGS, Papaspyrou et al. 2008)
	if weather tomorrow good	:	(then) ix₁ outside walk	

‚If the weather tomorrow is good, I will go outside for a walk.'

|				
(2)	**(SE)** CELULAR QUEBRAR	:	IX₁ IR COMPRAR NOVO	(Libras, Ampessan 2015)
	if mobile-phone break	:	ix₁ go buy new	

‚If the mobile phone breaks, I will buy a new one.'

2.1 Methodology and evaluation

Research questions

DGS and Libras are **unrelated sign languages.**
Which combinations of manual and nonmanual elements do they use to express a conditional?
Do they use similar or different strategies?

Elicitation by *Cheese Race Game* (cf. Dachkovsky), annotated by ELAN and evaluated by Excel (binary code)
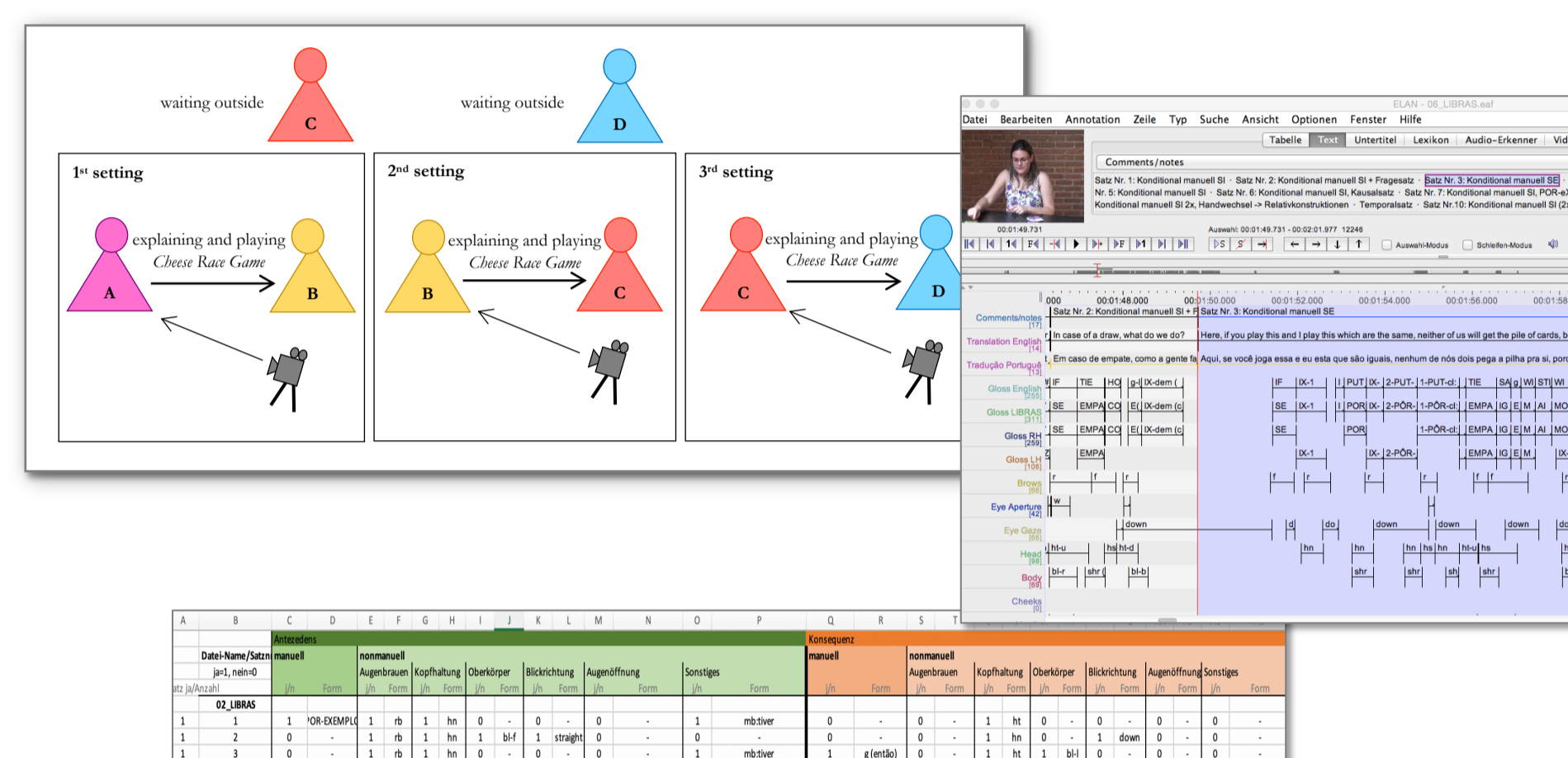
2.2 Participants

17 participants (8 ♀, 9 ♂)

34,3 years average age
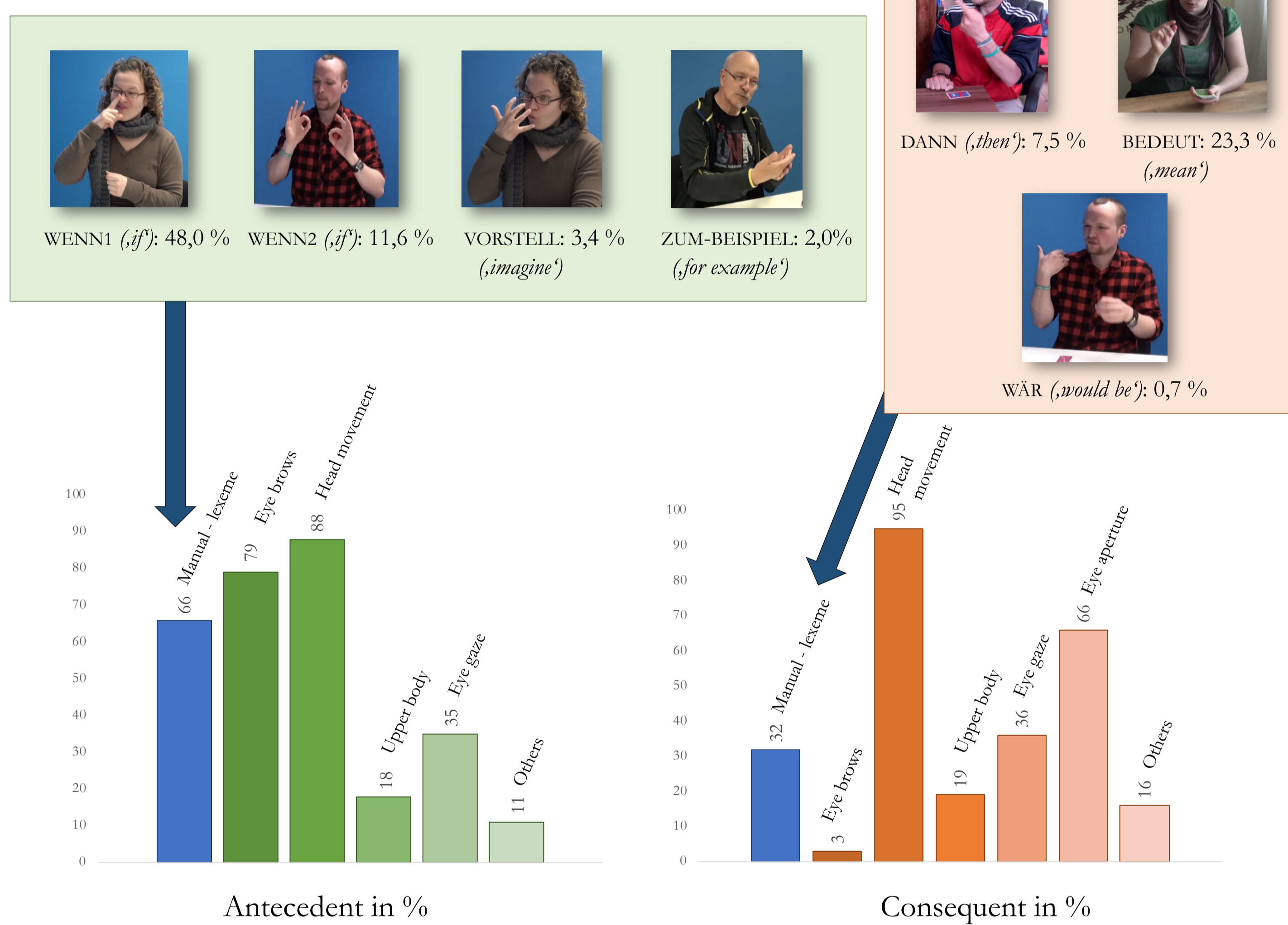
146 identified conditional clauses

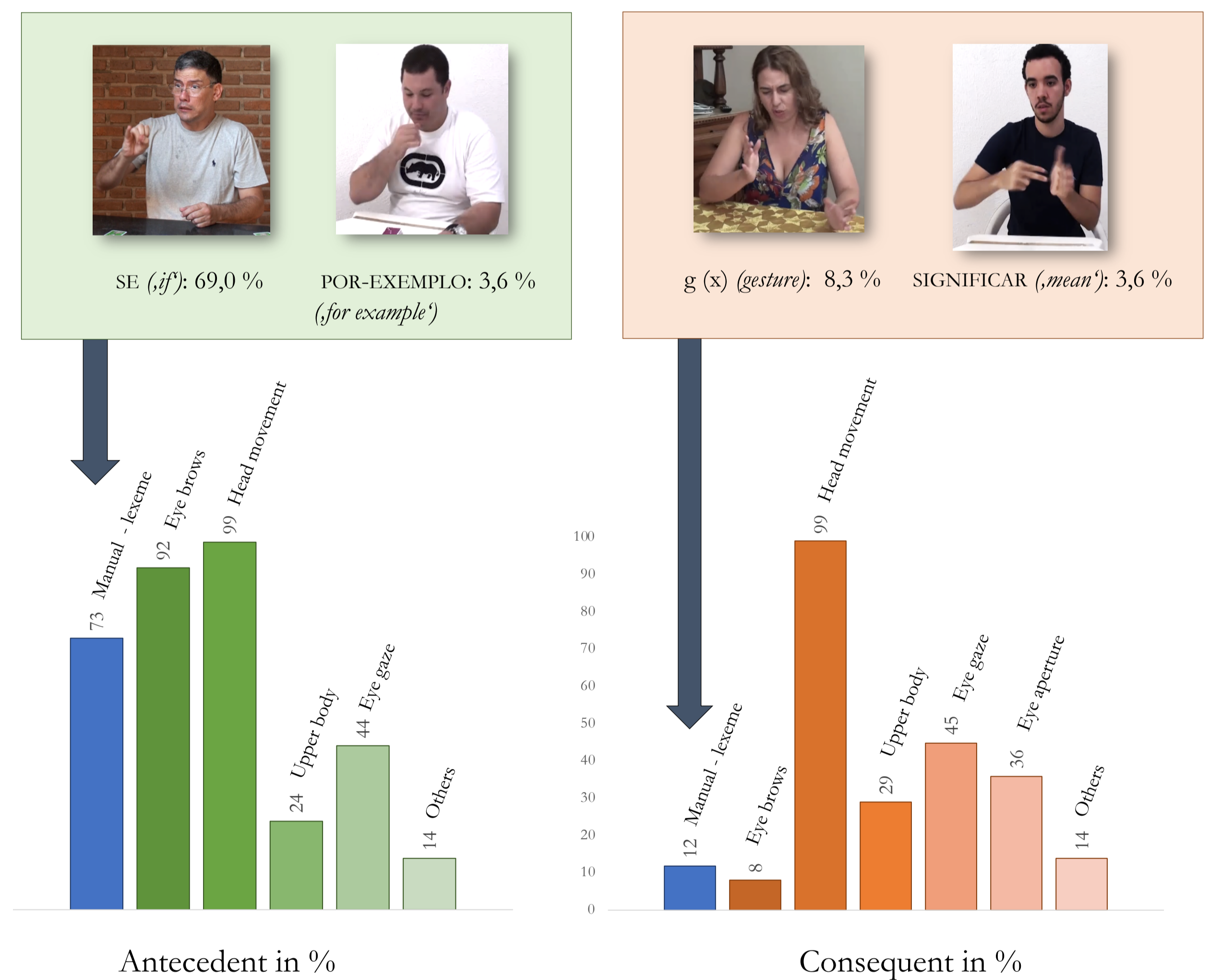**18** participants (8 ♀, 10 ♂)

38,2 years average age

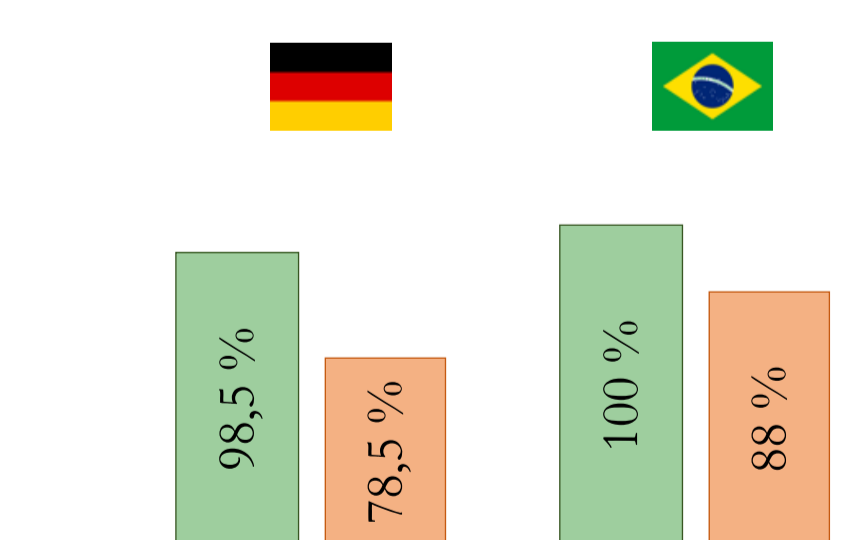**84** identified conditional clauses

3.1 Results in DGS

WENN1 (‚if'): 48,0 % | WENN2 (‚if'): 11,6 % | VORSTELL: 3,4 % (‚imagine') | ZUM-BEISPIEL: 2,0% (‚for example')

DANN (‚then'): 7,5 % | BEDEUT: 23,3 % (‚mean')

WÄR (‚would be'): 0,7 %

Antecedent in %: 66 Manual - lexeme, 79 Eye brows, 88 Head movement, 18 Upper body, 35 Eye gaze, 11 Others

Consequent in %: 32 Manual - lexeme, 3 Eye brows, 95 Head movement, 19 Upper body, 36 Eye gaze, 64 Eye aperture, 16 Others

3.2 Results in Libras

SE (‚if'): 69,0 % | POR-EXEMPLO: 3,6 % (‚for example')

g (x) (gesture): 8,3 % | SIGNIFICAR (‚mean'): 3,6 %

Antecedent in %: 73 Manual - lexeme, 92 Eye brows, 99 Head movement, 24 Upper body, 44 Eye gaze, 14 Others

Consequent in %: 12 Manual - lexeme, 8 Eye brows, 99 Head movement, 29 Upper body, 45 Eye gaze, 36 Eye aperture, 14 Others

4. Conclusion

Differences

① Libras: more nonmanuals — 98,5 % / 78,5 % — 100 % / 88 %

② Libras: higher use of the manual antecedent sign — 66,0 % / 73,0 %
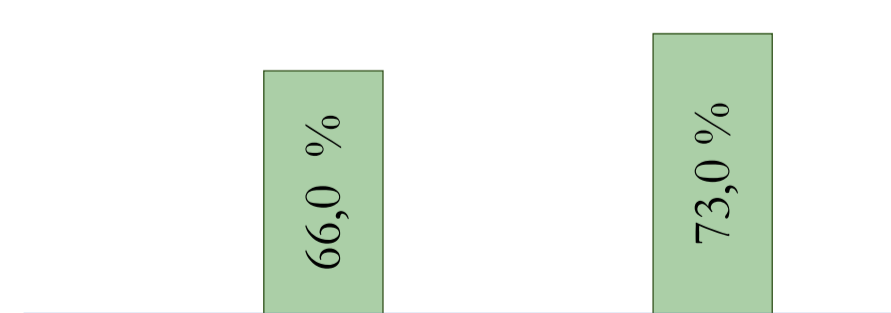
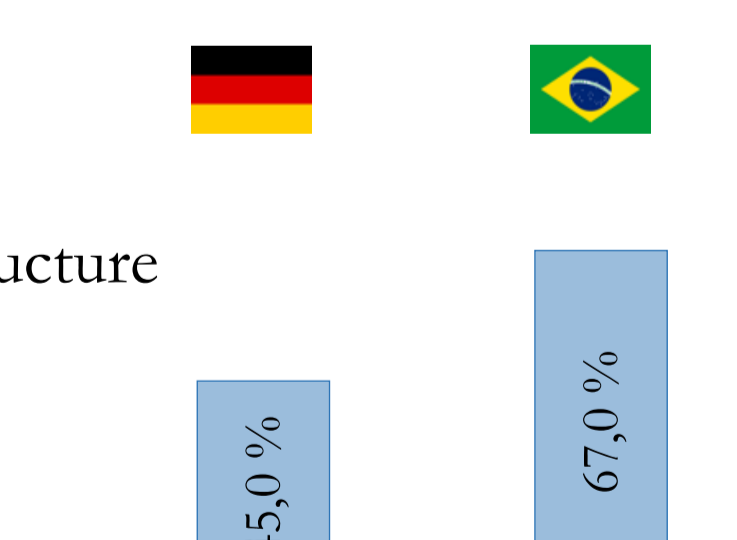③ DGS: more manual marking of consequent — 32,0 % / 12,0 %
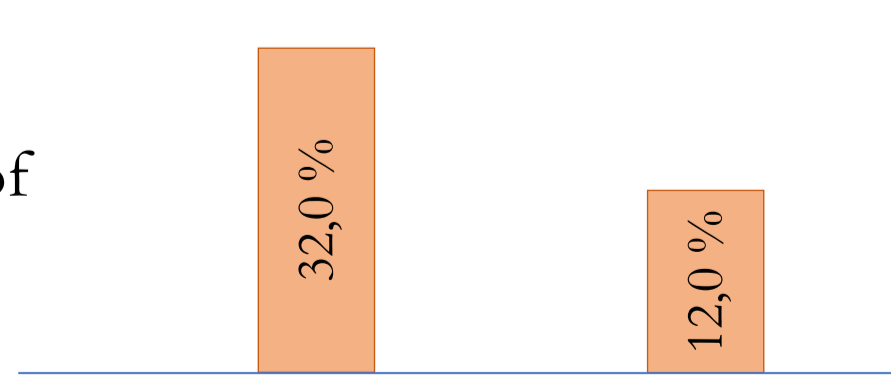
④ DGS: necessary to use two nonmanuals over the consequent — *Head movement Blink* / *Head movement*

Similarities

① Preferred conditional structure
A (m-nm) – C (m-nm):
A (m-nm) – C (nm): 45,0 % / 67,0 %
A (nm) – C (nm): 22,0 % / 21,0 %

② Manual sign for the antecedent and consequent are optional

③ Inversion seems to be impossible

④ Are the signs POR-EXEMPLO/ZUM-BEISPIEL and SIGNIFICAR/BEDEUT equivalents? Are they discourse markers? Is SIGNIFICAR/BEDEUT a copula?

⑤ Raised eyebrows have an additional prosodic function: continuation (cf. Dachkovsky, Healy & Sandler 2013)

DGS and Libras are unrelated sign languages, but are typologically similar:
„Nonmanual dominant sign languages"
(cf. Zeshan 2006)

5. References

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