

# Pragmatic analysis of hand gestures: a case study of co-speech gestures in two different genres of videos

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Ivana Polančec

**Pragmatička analiza gestikulacije rukama: geste koje  
prate govor u dvama žanrovima videa (studija slučaja)**

Diplomski rad

Mentorica: dr. sc. Marina Grubišić, doc.

Zagreb, 2020.

University of Zagreb  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Department of English

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Pragmatics studies how the transmission of meaning depends not only on structural linguistic knowledge (grammar, lexicon, etc.) of the speaker and listener but also on the context of the utterance, pre-existing knowledge about those involved, the inferred intent of the speaker, and other factors (Mey 2001:3-18). Pragmatics deals with, among other things, conversational implicature, which is a process in which the speaker implies, and a listener infers. In other words, pragmatics studies language that does not have to be directly spoken, but rather intended (Duffy 2008:168).

Pragmatic analysis is a method with which a linguist attempts to identify the full range of meanings and inferences that a reader or a hearer would make when encountering the locutions of an author or a speaker, considered in a communicative context (Duffy 2008:168). Communication consists of verbal mode, or language, and nonverbal mode, which denotes facial expressions, gestures, body language (position or movement), touch, eye contact, etc., in other words, anything that we can convey a message with that is not language in its written or oral form. This thesis will deal with only one of the sub-types of non-verbal communication - hand gestures, their role, and contribution to several specific genres of communication and the messages they convey. Adam Kendon, a pioneer in gesture research, defines gestures as a form of nonverbal communication in which visible bodily actions are used to communicate important messages, either in place of speech or together and in parallel with spoken words (Kendon 2004:1-4). When talking about hand gestures, or their communicative purpose, what may come to mind is sign language, or the signals used by traffic police, divers, motorcycle drivers, etc. However, this kind of hand gesture is not the topic of this thesis. It will deal with those hand gestures that are used in combination with speech, co-speech gestures.

## **1. LINGUISTICS AND HAND GESTURES**

### **1.1. BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

There are multiple theories on the development of human language. According to one, language is thought to have evolved from manual gestures. That belief is called the *gestural theory*. Neurolinguists point out that both symbolic hand gestures as well as language processing occur in Broca's and Wernicke's areas, which is an evidence-based connection between gestures and language. (Xu et al. 2009:20668). Proponents of the gestural theory argue that language has been in existence much longer than speech itself, in a non-verbal, gestural form. There is evidence that bipedalism (walking on two feet), which freed hands for the use of

tools, as well as gesturing, occurred before the development of vocal tract (Gillespie-Lynch 2013:160). The first person who suggested this theory was Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, a French philosopher who wrote on language and cognition (Corbalis 2008).

However, according to David McNeill, there are two major problems with the gestures-first model, i.e. gestural theory. Firstly, it posits that speech replaced gestures, which is not completely true, and secondly, it does not take into account the unity of speech and gestures. He calls these problems *Mead's Loop*, after George Herbert Mead, a philosopher. He argues that speech and hand gestures share the same psychological structure, i.e. are part of the same neural process, that they only occur during speech, and not while listening, that gestures have the same function as speech (communication, i.e. conveying a message), and that they are synchronized with speech. This model, opposing gestural theory is called the *growth point* model. *Growth point* is a psycholinguistic concept that denotes that speech and gestures are interconnected and therefore must be observed and analysed jointly. McNeill also calls gestures the “speaker’s thought in action” (McNeill 1985; 1992; 2008).

Research has found that patients with left-hemisphere injuries showed the same disorder with their sign language as patients who could speak with their language. Similar findings seem to prove that theory (Kimura 2003:137). Jana Iverson points out that gestures are not random; they reflect and follow speech even in young children, the congenitally blind people, people of all linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Iverson 1998:228). Simone Pika states that pre-linguistic humans were similar to their ape ancestors in the sense that they also predominantly communicated through gestures, and modern primates communicate messages in that way, too. Gestures used by people, in this case children, differ from that of apes in several ways. Firstly, apes mostly gesture to direct the attention of their addressee onto themselves, and children most often use gestures to turn attention onto an object that is neither them, nor their addressee, but something else. Turning attention to and sharing attention with another person is distinctly human behaviour (Pika 2008).

Gestures have sparked the interest of a wide array of scholars and researchers since as early as the first century AD, when the Roman orator and rhetorician Quintilianus was studying how gestures can help orators (Kendon 1982:45-62). In 1644, John Bulwer wrote an extensive study on communication, and there was a part which focused on gestures named *Chirologia: or the Naturall Language of the Hand* (Wollock, 2002:227). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Andrea de Jorio published his research on body language he observed on artworks from antiquity to the 19<sup>th</sup>

century (de Jorio 2000 [1832]). Nowadays, there is a peer-reviewed journal called *Gesture*<sup>1</sup>, first published in 2001 and accompanied by a book series, *Gesture Studies*<sup>2</sup>. Some of the most important contemporary authors who dealt with this topic will be mentioned in the following chapter.

## 1.2. HAND GESTURES – COMPLEX TERMINOLOGY

Before the analysis itself, it is necessary to introduce a theoretical framework in which the analysis operates. Pragmatics, and linguistics in general, of course, deal mostly with language and verbal communication, and literature uses terminology suited for the verbal mode, whereas for a discussion of the non-verbal mode, it is necessary to adjust terminology. This is not always an easy task, as terminology greatly varies from paper to paper. For example, Spencer D. Kelly suggests that well-established notions like *speaker* and *writer* need to be replaced with the word *communicator*, and *listener* and *reader* with the word *addressee* when dealing with a multimodal communicative setting. Multimodal in this context denotes the type of communication that is at once both verbal and non-verbal (Kelly 1999:577-592). In essence, all communication is multimodal: we use language, gesture, posture, and other non-verbal modes often at the same time to communicate (Norris 2004:1). We have to, however, adjust terminology depending on what we are focusing on.

When dealing with hand gestures, isolated from other modes of communication, verbal and non-verbal, literature divides them into different types. Some linguists only make a distinction between *representational gestures* that represent some aspect of the content of speech, and *beat gestures*, motorically simple ones, that do not represent speech content (Alibali et al. 2001:172). There are many proposed functional typologies (i.e. ones that take both form and meaning of a hand gesture into consideration). Janet Beavin Bavelas and colleagues, for example, define *illustrators* as gestures produced during a conversation. (Bavelas 1989). In another article, *illustrators* are divided further, into *topic* and *interactive* gestures, where *topic* ones are related to the very subject of the conversation, whereas *interactive* gestures are used to refer to the participants of the conversation (Bavelas et al. 1992:469). Both *topic* and *interactive* gestures would fall into the category of *representational* gestures proposed by other authors (Alibali et al. 2001:172). *Referential gestures* are *triadic*, which means that they include the *communicator*, *addressee*, and *referent* (an object referred to in a conversation). (Pika 2008:125)

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<sup>1</sup> Gesture journal - <http://gesturestudies.com/index.php/publications/journal-gesture/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.benjamins.com/catalog/gs>

Adam Kendon proposes a difference between *pragmatic* gestures, ones that indicate the type of a speech act or some aspect of discourse structure, and *substantive* gestures that express the content of an utterance. (Kendon 1995:247) He also created what is referred to as *Kendon's continuum* of hand gestures. On that continuum, the less linguistic gestures are on one side and the more linguistic kinds of gestures are on the other. On the far less-linguistic end of the spectrum there is sign language, due to the obligatory absence of speech due to the inability to speak. Pantomime, with the obligatory absence of speech despite the potential ability to speak, follows. Emblems, with the optional presence of speech are on a more linguistic side, which ends with the kind of gestures that follow speech. (Kendon 2004).

Natasha Abner and colleagues propose a distinction between *communicative* and *informative* gestures, after John Lyons's *informative* and *communicative* signals (Abner et al. 2015:440). The distinction is focused on the intentionality of meaning in *co-speech* gestures (hand movement that occurs along with speech). The *informative* kind is passive, they give information about the *communicator* to the *addressee(s)*, and they may or may not occur along with speech to convey a message. *Communicative* gestures, on the other hand, are produced intentionally. An example given to explain the difference is a person moving an actual glass towards their mouth: that is a gesture that *informs* people that they are thirsty. By moving their empty hand towards their mouth, a person can *communicate* to a waiter, for example, that they are thirsty (Abner et al. 2015:440). Among *co-speech* gestures, *manual* or hand gestures are the most commonly researched regarding communication, and facial gestures and bodily movements are a less common topic in linguistics. Hand gestures can be further descriptively divided into gestures that use an entire arm or both arms, gestures that require a hand or both hands, and gestures that require one or more fingers (Abner et al. 2015:442).

The most often used classification of hand gestures is that into *lexical*, *symbolic*, *deictic*, *motor*, and the so-called *Butterworths* (Krauss 2001:261-283; McNeill 1992). That classification is loosely based on Charles Sanders Peirce's 1901 seminal book on semiotics titled *Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Sign*, where he divided all signs into icons, indices, and symbols (Peirce 1902). The authors cited in this paragraph adopted his classification, made additions, and applied the nomenclature to hand gestures. This classification will be used in the analysis of the videos. *Lexical* or *iconic* gestures depict spatial relations, people, objects, and actions in the physical environment (Mayberry et al. 2000:192). Children are taught this kind of gestures from an early age (e.g. through songs such as *Itsy Bitsy Spider*, where a person singing needs to gesture "climbing" and "rain" for instance), and further develop their gestures through symbolic play (Namy et al. 2008:304). For instance, one such gesture is crossing hands



and rubbing their upper arms, which communicates to people that we are cold and accentuates the utterance “I am cold.” Like this one, many other lexical gestures are widespread across countries and cultures (Kendon 2004:43). Extensive research with various results has been conducted on the topic of the role of lexical gestures. Adam Kendon states that they can modify the meaning, i.e. semantic content of a word (Kendon 2004), Robert Krauss argues that they can help in the process of lexical retrieval, and that they therefore occur before speech (Krauss 2001). Research conducted by Judith Holler et al. points out that, while that may be true in some cases, there is empirical evidence that hand gestures play a predominately (but not exclusively) socio-pragmatic, communicative, role. In the research, participants were asked to provide words for given definitions in three contexts: face-to-face communication, conversation led while separated by a screen, or speaking into a voice-recorder. The assignment was purposely designed to elicit tip-of-the-tongue states, in which lexical retrieval is made difficult. Speakers produced a larger number of representational gestures face-to-face, than in other contexts. Since they occurred during voice recording, too, the conclusion is that they may have a role in lexical retrieval, as well. (Holler et al. 2013). *Symbolic, emblematic, or quotable* hand gestures are a sub-category of *iconic* gestures that are widely recognised, fixed, and conventional. They can be used along with speech or be independent of it (Krauss, 2001:261-283). They can also be culture-specific, which is why they ought to be used with caution outside of one’s own culture or country. For instance, what is called the “okay sign” (thumb and pointing finger in a circle, the three remaining fingers straight) in the USA and many European countries, is an obscenity in Brazil and Turkey (Morris 1979). *Deictic, indexical, or pointing* gestures can refer to tangible or intangible objects, phenomena, or entities. They can be used with or in place of speech. They entail pointing motions, and therefore often co-occur with demonstrative pronouns (Krauss, 2001:261-283). They can either have a declarative, informative, or demonstrative function (Cochet et al. 2014:281). An important *deictic* hand gesture is the *turn-keeping* gesture, i.e. one used by the communicator, who is pointing towards the addressee to let them know it is their turn to say something on the topic. It is especially common in a communicative setting that involves more than two people (Ishi et al. 2018). *Motor, beat, or rhythm-giving* gestures are closely tied to prosody and rhythm of speech. They cannot occur independently; they always co-occur with verbal communication. Examples are *emphasis* gestures, gestures that follow interjections, and *enumeration* gestures. They differ in form from person to person (McNeill 1992).

While these correspond to Peirce’s fundamental types of semiotic sign, the last type, *Butterworths*, is a category defined by David McNeill in his article *Hand and mind: what*

*gestures reveal about thought*. They are also called *speech failure* gestures. McNeill named them after Brian Butterworth who argued that many gestures in speech come from speech failures (McNeill 1992:77). They occur in an effort to retrieve a word, sentence structure, etc., often along with fillers or in-speech breaks (McNeill 1992:77; Navarretta 2016).

## **2. CORPUS AND ANALYSIS**

Gestures analysed here are taken from a total of six videos found on YouTube. In each of the videos, there are two or three people in a conversational setting. They are all filmed in a way that at least their upper body, hands included, is shown on screen. The main criterion for choosing videos was that the people in each video have their hands free and on camera at least when they speak. The first three videos are thematically similar, and the second three are, too. Videos from the first group were taken from three different English-learning channels (English with Lucy, mmmEnglish, and JenniferESL). They are approximately 20 minutes long. In these videos, conversations are mostly descriptive, topics more premeditated, the videos edited. In them, the three teachers use the discussion method teaching technique, where the desired outcome is for students to learn to discuss more effectively. (Larson 2000:661-677)

The second group of videos was taken from a talk show interview channel called the *Off Camera* show. The description of the channel says: “*Off Camera* with Sam Jones is a show that features conversations with the most iconic, curious, interesting artists of our time. Jones delves deep into the process and craft of actors, musicians, directors, writers, and athletes in authentic, intimate conversations that go far deeper than any other talk show on television.” The three people whose interviews are analysed here are Robert Downey Jr., Kristen Bell, and David Tennant. Interviews with these movie stars are longer, but on YouTube, they are only available in short clips lasting around five minutes, and a series of those clips is analysed in this thesis. In this case, conversations, and more importantly hand gestures are more ad-lib, not premeditated as in the first group of videos, i.e. the setting is less formal. It is important to add, however, that the three actors are professionals in verbal as well as non-verbal expression which may or may not influence the kind and amount of gestures they are using. Since this thesis analyses only six videos, belonging to two genres, it is a case study, rather than extensive corpus study. Therefore, the results and conclusions of the study may not apply to some other genre, or even video in the same genre.

Through the analysis of these videos, this paper investigates how hand gestures, as a form of non-verbal communication, complement verbal communication. The first hypothesis is

that not every speaker uses the same amount and the same type of hand gesture. For example, Ishi, Mikata, and Ishiguro found in their study, albeit of Japanese conversation, that the most common hand gestures used by participants were *beat gestures*, i.e. those that followed the rhythm of speech. Turn-keeping or turn-giving gesture followed in frequency. Other *deictic* gestures directly related to the topic of space and spatial relations that accompanied verbal messages such as “then turn right” were the third most commonly used type (Ishi et. al., 2018). Similarly, gestures found in these videos are explained in terms of their form and meaning and put into one of the five categories of function explained above. Many hand gestures, especially emblems have descriptive (nick)names that make them easy to explain and refer to, like the *okay* gesture, the *Italian* gesture, and *praying* gesture that fall into the category of common knowledge. Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen (Ekman et al. 1969), Melissa Wagner and Nancy Armstrong (Wagner et al. 2003), and Desmond Morris (Morris 2015) are just some of the authors that dedicated entire books to emblems. With the growing popularity of computer and mobile messenger platforms, the popularity of emojis expanded, many of which show hand gestures, emblems in particular, as well.

Since Microsoft Word does not allow insertion of video clips, all screenshot descriptions as well as some other gestures mentioned contain time stamps or time spans at which each of the gestures appears. Those occurring multiple times throughout the video do not have a time stamp.

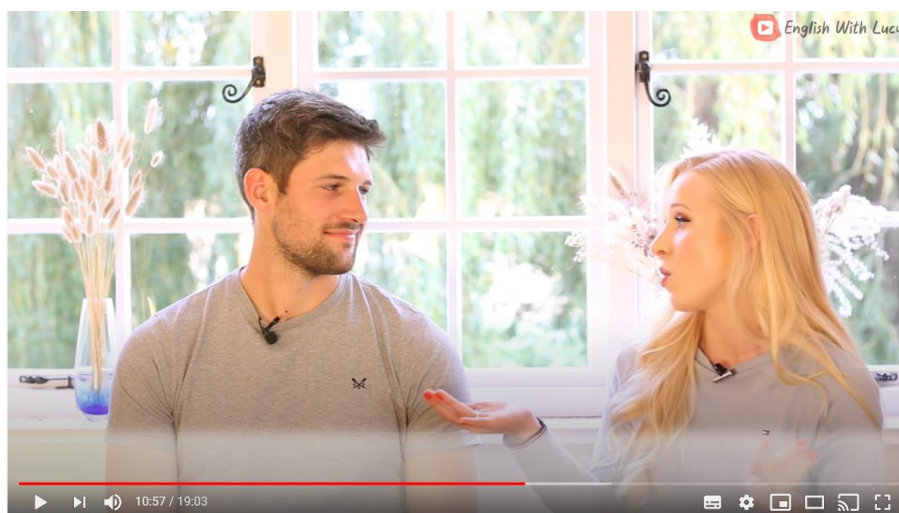
## **2.1. EXAMPLE 1 – ENGLISH WITH LUCY**

The title of this video is *English Conversation - Daily Routine (with vocabulary)*. Its length is 19 minutes and 3 seconds. There are two participants: a British YouTuber called Lucy Bella, and her fiancé William. Lucy runs the *English with Lucy* channel aimed at young people who want to improve their English, especially spoken. William is with her as a guest in this particular video, since it is a video on conversation, although she normally makes lessons alone. This particular conversation differs from typical conversations in the fact that they are looking towards their camera, and from time to time addressing the viewers they cannot see, and who cannot participate in the conversation.

One of the situations in which we tend to use a lot of gestures is when we are explaining something, teachers being a great example. This video is great for showing that we tend to use hand gestures mostly when we speak, and not when we are in the role of a listener. When we are listening, we tend to strike a pose, maybe accompany it with an occasional rhythmical nod. However, not everyone uses their hands a lot to accompany speaking (e.g. William here hardly ever moves his hands). In conclusion, gestures are optional.

William makes a total of four hand gestures, all in the last part of the video. First, he makes two lexical gestures at the 15:51-15:57 time stamp. When he says: “and they’re all blended *together*...” he draws his hands closer and his fingers touch, and when he says “...and made into *a ball*” he shapes a ring, or a ball, with his index finger and thumb. At 17:50 he makes a deictic gesture of pointing down as Lucy says: “write it *down below*,” and at 18:38 he blows a kiss, which is an emblem, after Lucy does the same. In other words, he mirrors her behaviour. The type of gestures that Lucy uses the least is Butterworths. In her case, they consist of putting one hand into the other, and rubbing hands together, like at 5:37-5:43, and when she does this she follows the gesture with an “uhm” sound. What follows are deictic gestures, most of which are pointing at Will to give him turn to say something, as seen at 10:57 stamp, for example (screenshot 1). She also points at herself when she says either “I,” “me,” “myself,” or “personally” (screenshot 2), she points outside, behind her back with a thumb when she mentions their barbecue or gym, and down when she says: “comment down below.” A specific situation in which she uses such gestures is explaining when something happens. At the word “before” she points behind her back, and she also points to the left when talking about an event that happens first, and to the right when she talks about events happening at a later point as if she was imagining a timeline and showing when something happened on it. Symbolic gestures are equally as frequent as deictic ones in this video. Other than the aforementioned blowing a kiss, she makes “the okay” or “excellent” gesture at 11:45 when she is talking about food (screenshot 3). That emblem consists of a ring formed with the index finger and thumb, and the remaining three fingers pointed upwards. With gestures like this one, caution is advisable. Its meaning is “OK” or “excellent” to a Westerner, “money” to a Japanese person, “zero” to the French, but it is an insult to the Turks and Brazilians. When she is giving explanations, or reasons for something, like at the very beginning of the video when she is explaining why she decided to make the video at 0:26, she makes *the Italian* or *Mano/mani a borsa* (hand(s) in the purse) gesture (screenshot 4). Adam Kendon was the person behind the name of that gesture (Kendon 1995). It is made by bringing outstretched fingers together, pointing them upwards, and moving the hand up and down in the wrist, and it is used for elaborating, giving a comment, etc. It can be a rhythm giving gesture at the same time. She makes several *halt* gestures throughout the video, often following the interjection “but,” or “however” which is why we could also argue that it is an emphasis marking gesture, and they fall into the category of beats since we use them along with the change in intonation, and flow of speech (screenshot 5) (Wagner 2003). Lexical or iconic hand gestures are more common with Lucy. She has gestures for notions like “pronunciation” (finger going to and from her mouth), “come in” and “leave,”

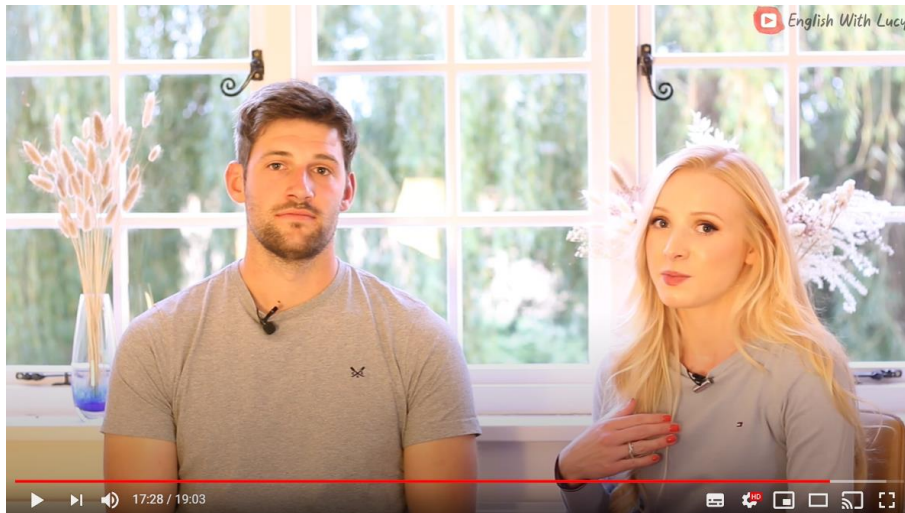
size adjectives like “long,” “short,” “big,” “small,” shapes like “round,” actions like “shovelling,” and much more. They often come in bulks, i.e. she often describes step-by-step processes or routines, and mimes, for instance, the types of exercises that William does in their home gym, at 9:03-9:26, and cooking a dish at 14:25-14:39.<sup>3</sup> The category of gestures that are most frequently used here is beat gestures. The ones used for further accentuating or emphasising a feature of speech are very common in general. The aforementioned *halt* gesture falls into this category because it accentuates “but.” (Wagner 2003). For example, when Lucy asks William what time he wakes up, her hand is not visible on the screen, but when she follows this question up with “What time do you usually get up?,” she emphasises “get up” in three ways: intonation (speech), hand gesture (screenshot 6), blue instead of black letters in the subtitles of the video. The way in which a person gives themselves rhythm is very individual. Apart from the upward-pointing index finger, Lucy often “chops air” with her vertically held palm or makes a ring with her index finger and thumb and makes up and down motions, as if putting a pin on something, i.e. pinpointing something. We can see both of those gestures at least once per minute of the video.



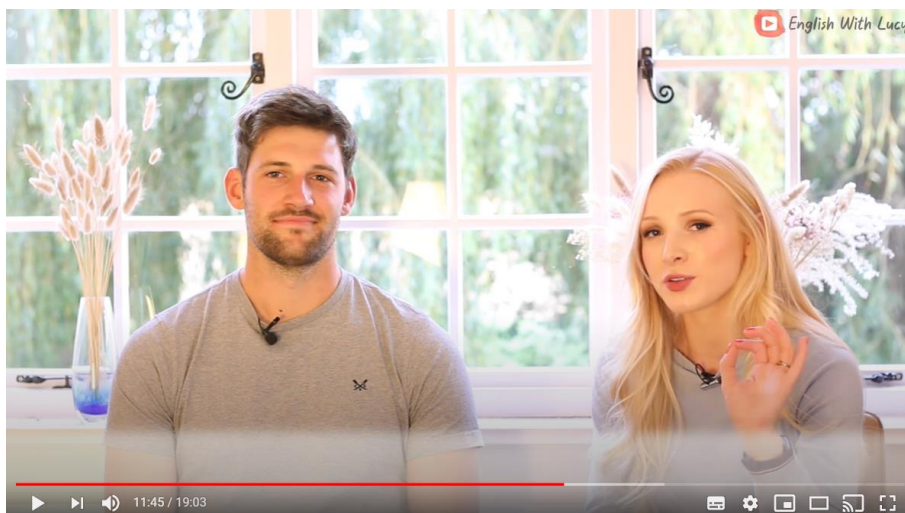
**Screenshot 1:** Turn keeping gesture; “What about you?” – 10:57

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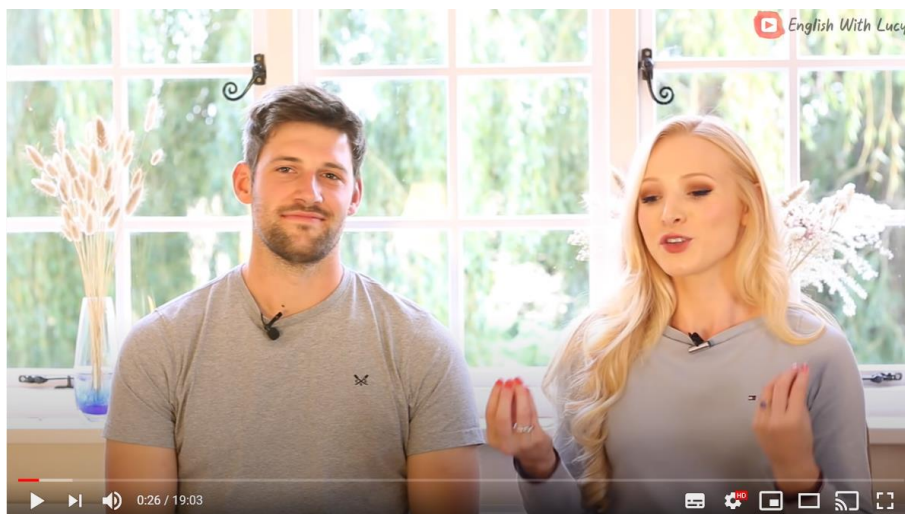
<sup>3</sup> Lexical gestures in this video are most commonly motions, which is why they cannot be captured well with a screenshot.



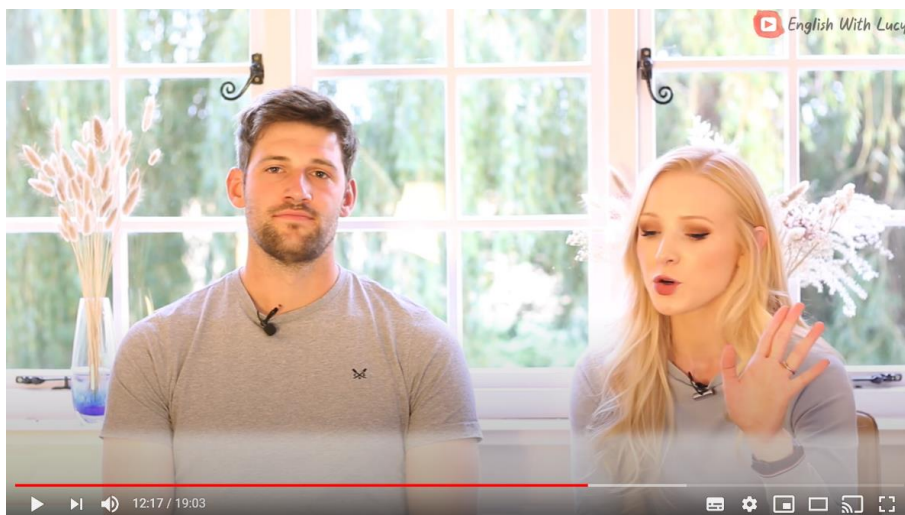
**Screenshot 2:** Self-addressing gesture – 17:28



**Screenshot 3:** The *OK/Excellent* symbolic gesture – 11:45



**Screenshot 4:** The *mani a borsa* symbolic gesture – 0:26



**Screenshot 5:** the *halt/stop* gesture – 12:17



**Screenshot 6:** A gesture of emphasis takes the form of an upward-pointing index finger in Lucy's case – 2:13

## 2.2. EXAMPLE 2 – MMMENGLISH

The title of this video is *Talking about LOVE in English* ❤️❤️❤️ *Idioms & Phrasal Verbs / ft. Mark Rosenfeld*. Its length is 19 minutes and 13 seconds. There are two participants: Emma, a self-titled English confidence coach, YouTuber who runs the *mmmEnglish* channel, where she focuses on honing her viewers' speaking and pronunciation skills, and Mark Rosenfeld, a relationship expert, dating coach, and life coach who helps women gain confidence in that field of life. They are from Australia. Unlike in the first video, Emma and Mark talk to each other quite a lot, too, along with addressing their viewership. She is sitting with her hands on her knees most of the time when she is not talking, and one of Mark's arms is resting on the couch. It is interesting to see that he mostly gestures with both his hands, while she normally

only gestures with her right hand, or arm. The first nine seconds of the video is an intro of sorts, that consists of hand gestures that they make during their conversation.

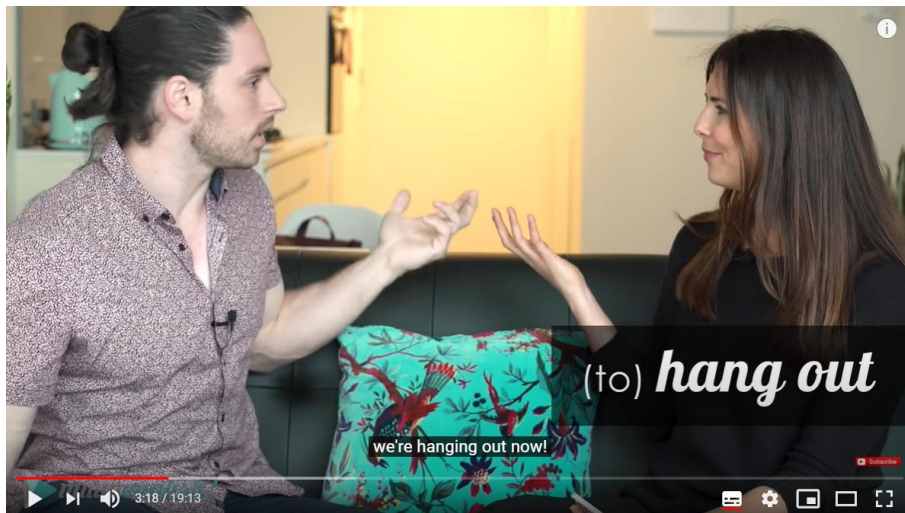
There is a large number of hand gestures in this video. Both participants make them alone or even together. Mark copies Emma's behaviour by repeating the gesture himself, e.g. at mark 3:18 when he repeats after her: "we are hanging out now" (screenshot 7) and they make the open palm gesture. That is called mirroring, popularly called the "Monkey see, monkey do" behaviour. It is very common to assume a pose of a person we admire, and uncommon to mirror behaviour of people we dislike. They make some of the gestures together, especially lexical when they are explaining the origin of the "tie the knot" phrase at 10:13-10:20 (screenshot 8). Although David McNeill says that gestures only occur when a person is in the role of communicator, at 7:40 timestamp we can see that Mark points his finger at Emma as if saying "you have got the point, exactly" and nods in agreement, although he is only a listener now (McNeill 1982).<sup>4</sup> The most commonly used type of gesture here is beats. Their rhythm-giving hand gestures take different forms; they have different styles of gesturing. Emma is giving herself rhythm mostly with circular motions of her right hand that changes the position of fingers from the open palm to the *mano a borsa* posture, as is observable at 0:26-0:40. Mark uses both his hands, in open palm positions with fingers held spread apart, and does up-and-down and circular motions as his speech flows. Those motions are from time to time stopped by a separate, say lexical gesture. That is observable at 5:05-5:30 for example. As for the lexical gestures, Mark shows many more than Emma does, and his most common, "signature" gestures are clenched fists, with words like "man," (screenshot 9) "connecting," (13:12) "arguments" (13:15), and intertwined fingers, with words like "relationship" (13:34). Emma has a specific use of deictic gestures. Multiple times throughout the video she points behind her back at the mention of something that occurred in the past, with words like "my ex" (screenshot 10), "(in) the past" (14:48), "past tense" (7:51). An emblem that Emma uses (4:30) is the *slit throat* or *throat slash* gesture at the word "awkward," (screenshot 11) which gives the addressee the message to stop doing something, cut (it) out, abort the mission, or shut up (Wagner et al. 2003). Starting at 5:27, she gestures the *air quote* (screenshot 12) when she talks about "the concept of casual hook-up." They are normally used when expressing that something is sarcastic, ironic, with a word used in a special way, or simply instead of saying "so-called" in front of a notion, like here. Their written equivalent is the scare quotes (Cirillo 2019). An example of Butterworth

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<sup>4</sup> Here, Emma is not addressing Mark, she is talking to the camera, so Mark is not the addressee, but he is in the role of listener and observer.



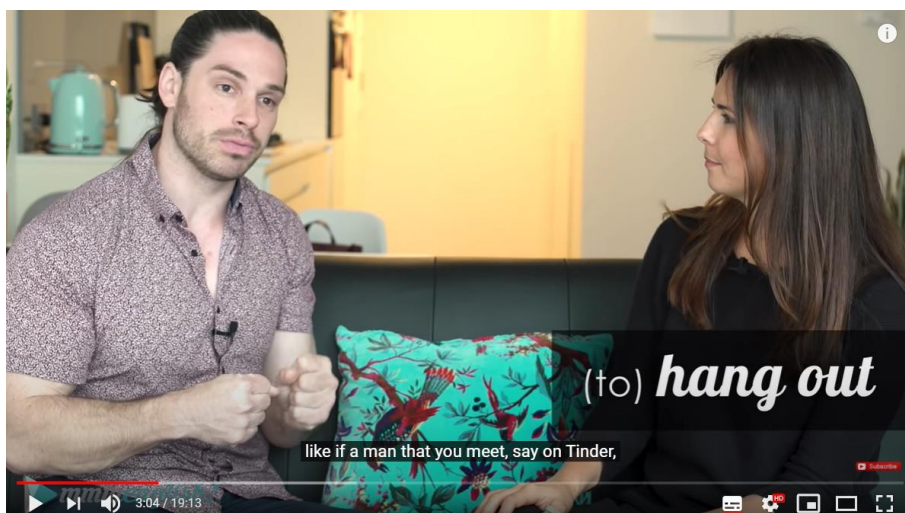
in this video is when Emma clasps her hand together (screenshot 13) at the end of one of her final sentences, at 18:50-18:55.



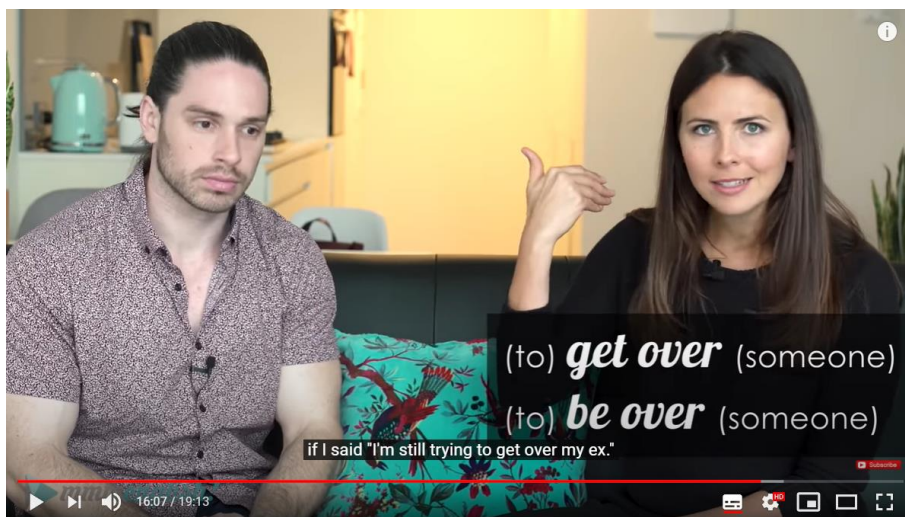
**Screenshot 7:** Mirroring behaviour – 3:18



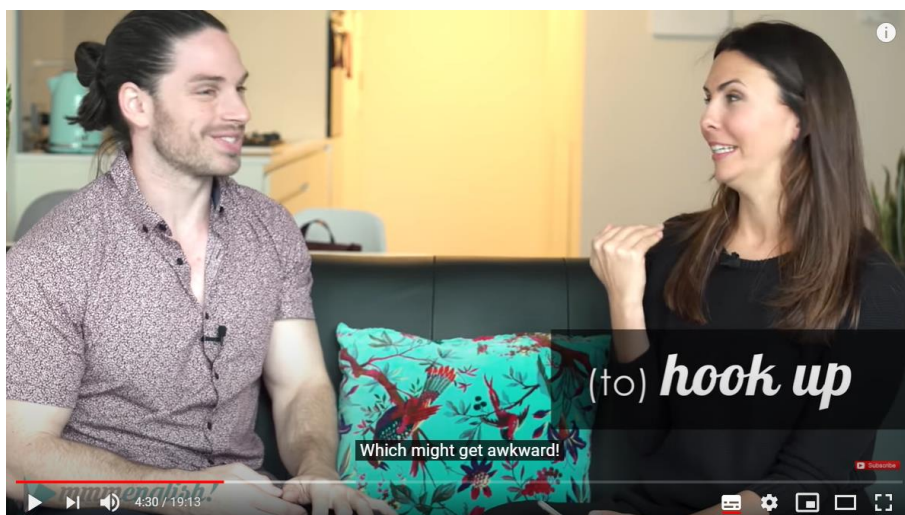
**Screenshot 8:** Two or more people can participate in making a single hand gesture – 10:16



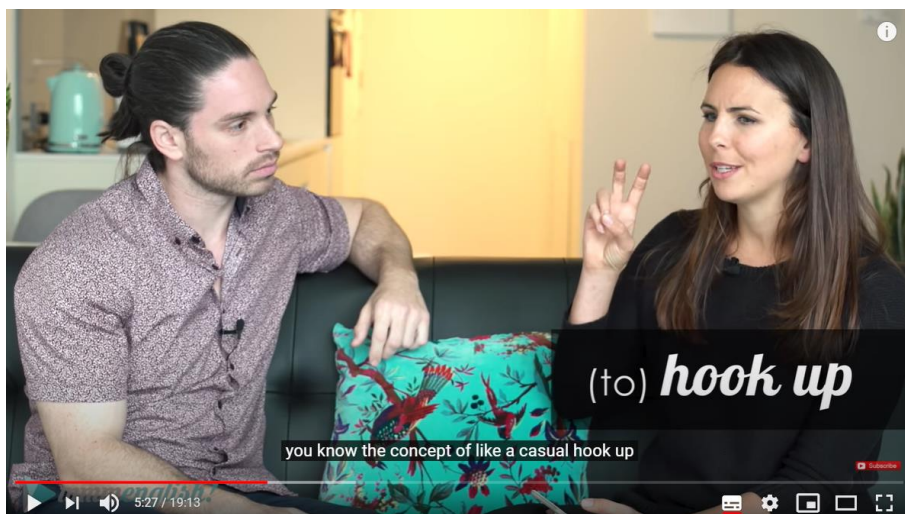
**Screenshot 9:** The lexical gesture that Mark uses for “a man” is fist clenching – 3:04



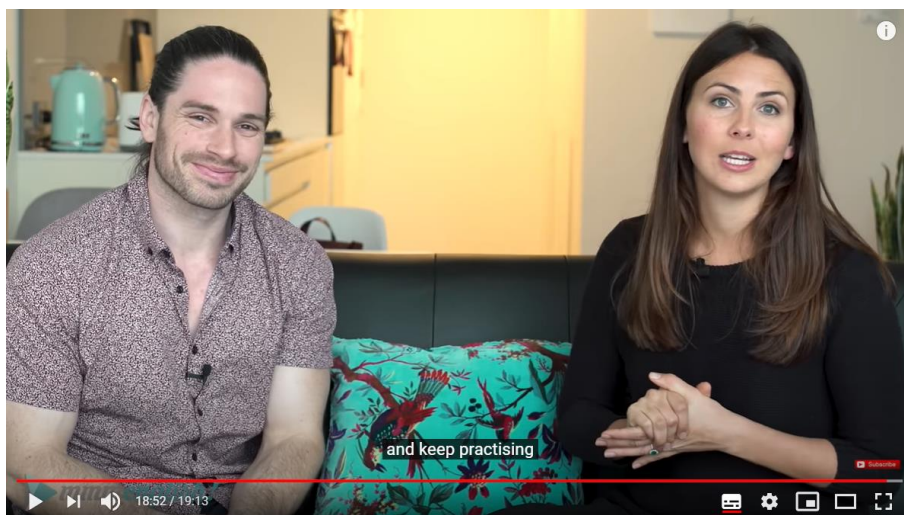
**Screenshot 10:** Deictic gestures can be used with nouns like “ex,” too – 16:07



**Screenshot 11:** The emblem used for the word “awkward” is the *throat slash*, with the meaning “you should not do that, stop, cut it out, do not”



**Screenshot 12:** The *air quote* emblem – 5:27



**Screenshot 13:** An example of a Butterworth: Emma is trying to come up with her closing sentence for the end of the video – 18:52

### 2.3. EXAMPLE 3 – JENNIFER ESL

The title of this video is *Lesson 104* 🧑🏫 *Basic English with Jennifer - Talking about Favorites & the Past*. Its length is 21 minutes and 28 seconds. The three participants in this video on conversation are Jennifer, an English as a second language teacher (sitting in the middle), and her students, Flavia (on the right on the screen) and Andreia (on the left side of the screen). They are talking rather slowly, at a much slower pace than the previous analysed participants, since they are not native speakers of English. Flavia and Andreia never address or acknowledge the audience, Jennifer does. In conversations between three people, or triadic exchange, one person is the *communicator*, typically only one is an *addressee*, and the third is called the *mediator*. (Mason et al. 2003:52-55)

Jennifer gestures the most, by far, Andreia occasionally, and Flavia hardly ever. The most common type of gestures used here is the turn keeping gesture, which is logical in triadic exchange. It is usually Jennifer who decides whose turn it is, and whom to direct a question to, while the girls are mainly just answering. Similar to previous examples, Jennifer and Andreia point backward when she says “yesterday,” and talk about the past. The next most common type is beats. They are mostly circular motions with the *Mani a borsa* position of the hand, or upward turned open palms, or pointing along with exclamations like “oh!” Jennifer has a specific gesture whenever there are two options to choose from. Pronouncing each option, she makes a hand movement, as if that hand were now the subject that she is addressing, like at 3:23-3:39 (screenshot 14). From 6:10-6:20, she is explaining that the word “favorite” in American English can have two or three syllables and she makes a series of gestures to follow up the beat in pronouncing them. She is making hand gestures along with speech in a similar

fashion throughout the video, to help the girls to pronounce phrases, i.e. from 7:27-8:05. Meanwhile, Andreia is fidgeting with her fingers, which is a Butterworth example here (screenshot 15). An emblem is her facepalm gesture, when she cannot remember something, like at 3:00 (screenshot 16). People put their palm across the face when feeling embarrassed, frustrated, when in disbelief, and similar. Among lexical gestures, there are gestures for “tea,” “spilled,” “rushing,” “little,” “knock over,” “looking for,” etc.



**Screenshot 14:** “A man or a woman” – each palm represents one option – 3:24



**Screenshot 15:** Jennifer is explaining something with the *Mani a borsa* gesture, meanwhile, Andreia is rubbing her hands, which continues into her speech – 7:22



**Screenshot 16:** Facepalm – 2:58

#### **2.4. EXAMPLE 4 – THE OFF CAMERA SHOW – ROBERT DOWNEY JR**

Four short videos of the interview that form a whole are analysed here, and they are titled: *Robert Downey Jr Contemplates the Next Phase of His Life After Marvel* (referred to as video 4a), *Robert Downey Jr Describes the Balancing Act of Personalities on a Film Set* (video 4b), *Robert Downey Jr Recounts His Time on Saturday Night Live* (video 4c), and *Robert Downey Jr Finds More than Validation from His Wife Susan Downey* (video 4d). The combined length of the cluster of videos is 17 minutes and 41 seconds.

The host of the Off Camera Show is leaning into his chair, and mostly gesturing with open palms turned to Mr. Downey Jr, who also assumes a relaxed pose. Most of the time, he mirrors the pose of Sam Jones, the host, when not speaking (video 4b:screenshot 17). He even mentions it in video 4b (0:16-0:30). Sam Jones is the one here who addresses his guests, or interviewees, as well as his audience, e.g. when he asks them to “click right over here,” (video 4a: 3:13), so he makes many deictic gestures. Apart from that, his gesture for asking questions is arms spread wide and palms open, fingers spread apart (video 4a: screenshot 18). Robert Downey Jr often gives his speech some beat with his whole arms raised above his head. Another gesture for adding rhythm to his speech here is the enumeration gesture (video 4b 1:43-1:50; video 4c: 2:36-2:46). He makes a large amount of lexical gestures, e.g. for “psychically,” (video 4a: screenshot 19), “zone” (video 4b: 0:38), “group of people” (video 4b: 0:53), “the man” (video 4b: 2:38), “friends” (video 4c: 1:05). One of his lexical gestures turns into an emblematic, *Merkel diamond* gesture (video 4b: screenshot 20) (Connolly 2013). He puts his hands in the position, as seen on the screenshot, at the word “small” and keeps talking holding it, making it a beat gesture, too. The pose was made famous by the German chancellor Angela Merkel. He makes the *air quotes* made with only one finger, the index finger, of each of his

hands. One more important emblem to mention here is the *I surrender* gesture, the raised hands, palms towards a person in front (video 4d: screenshot 20). He gestures this when explaining how his wife had told him that she would not be able to do the difficult work (getting off drugs) for him. A Butterworth in Sam Jones' case is palms held together on his knee (video 4c: 0:29), putting a thumb into his fist, indicating nervousness he feels when trying to come up with what to ask or say (video 4d: 0:14). and Robert Downey Jr is turning the ring on his finger (video 4c: 0:35) or one hand in the other along with the “uhm” sound (video 4c: 0:52).



**Screenshot 17:** Mirroring posture: monkey see, monkey do – video 4b: 0:06



**Screenshot 18:** Intonation change in speech is followed by a change in gesture – video 4a: 2:24



**Screenshot 19:** the lexical gesture for the word “psychically” – video 4a: 0:51



**Screenshot 20:** The *Merkel* gesture – video 4b: 3:03



**Screenshot 21:** The *I surrender* gesture – video 4d: 3:20

## 2.5. EXAMPLE 5 – THE OFF CAMERA SHOW – KRISTEN BELL

The four videos of the interview with Kristen Bell analysed here have the combined length of 14 minutes and 25 seconds. They are referred to as videos 5a-d, and *called Kristen Bell Explains There Is No Shame In Feeling Anxiety & Depression, Kristen Bell: "I Feel Like I'm Going To Explode," Kristen Bell: "I Grew Up Thinking The World Was Black & White," Kristen Bell's Middle School Crush... Maybe.*

In videos 5a and 5b, the topic is anxiety and depression, and we can see on the actress that she is nervous. She has a lot of breaks in her speech, and the amount of speech failure gestures, or Butterworths, is higher here than in any of the videos looked at so far. Ms. Bell is not the only one with gestures of that kind, the host is uncomfortable at times, talking about a topic that sensitive. She either fidgets with her fingers or rings, scratches her neck (screenshot 22), and he rests one of his hand on his knee much more. Beat gestures are slower, calmer, too. They take the form of open palm, in Kristen Bell's case mostly turned towards herself, the *Mano a borsa* pose of hands occasionally (5b: 1:27). The topic of conversation has a huge impact on the kind and amount of gestures used. A notable emblem she signs is the *Yes!* or *success* gesture, i.e. both hands in fists, knuckles out, lowered down in a fast motion. It is a celebratory gesture (video 5b: screenshot 23). Videos 5c and 5d are much lighter, so beats gather pace. More lexical gestures appear, like pointing at the head for "neurons" (5c: 3:10). An emblem used here is an index finger on the chin, indicating deep thinking. (5d: screenshot 24).

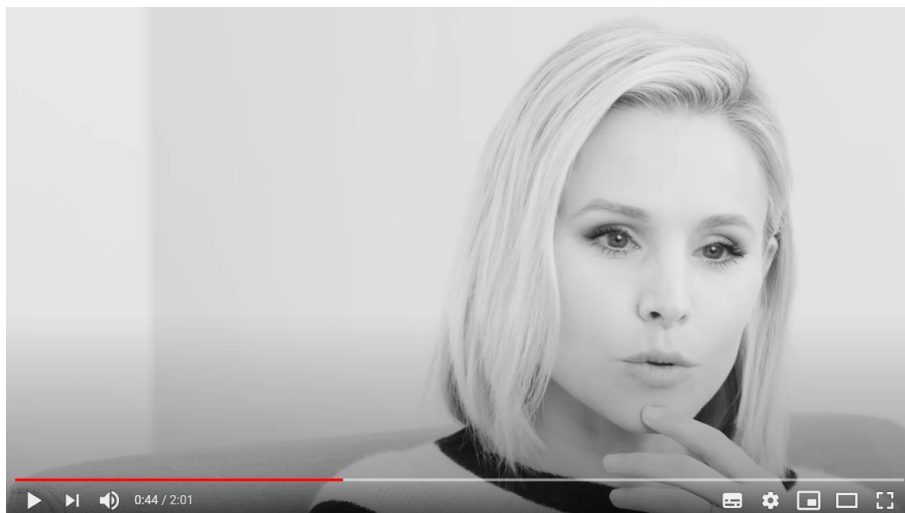


**Screenshot 22:** Neck scratching indicates nervousness – video 5a: 2:45





**Screenshot 23:** “YES!” – video 5b: 2:39



**Screenshot 24:** Chin stroke is a gesture of deep thinkers and evaluators – 5d: 0:44

## 2.6. EXAMPLE 6 – THE OFF CAMERA SHOW – DAVID TENNANT

There are four videos, 6a-d analysed here, of combined length of 16 minutes and 23 seconds. They are called *David Tennant Fights the Demon of Imposter Syndrome*, *David Tennant's Shock from the Loss of Anonymity Due to Doctor Who*, *Can 'The Doctor' Play Hamlet? - David Tennant and the World Hold Their Breath*, *David Tennant Fantasized About Being Doctor Who Since He was a Kid*.

Right from the start of video 6a, there is a noticeable amount of deictic gestures. E.g. David Tennant gestures “move on” by pointing behind him. He does not use a large number of beats, and he tends to hold his fingers intertwined, with only his thumbs moving on his lap. As is the case with most of the communicators, he too has the rather common lexical gesture of pointing at his head at words like “brain” (6a: 1:37). David Tennant’s beats consist of palms moving up and down in chopping motions, but his palms are facing himself, not pointing in the

direction of the addressee, or camera, which is untypical. (6a: 4:14). The host of the show gestures a lot in video 6d, it is obvious that he likes the topic. An example of an emblem used here is nose touch. We tend to do that when we are upset, or scared, and indeed, Tennant says “oh shoot!” and slightly touches his nose bridge (6c: screenshot 25). In 6c he is pretending to hold a microphone (6c: screenshot 26). This is a lexical gesture, but this time he did not have to say the word microphone, it is up for the addressee to conclude what the gesture means through context. They are talking about a BBC reporter that came to see Tennant’s first rendition of Hamlet.



**Screenshot 25:** When upset, people sometimes touch their noses – 6c: 2:55



**Screenshot 26:** Pretending to hold a microphone – 6c: 3:18

## CONCLUSION

Hand gestures are widely used nowadays, and with various purposes. This thesis does not cover every use. It is limited to analysing co-speech hand gestures in six twenty-minute videos. Since linguistics, and pragmatics more specifically, mostly deal with verbal communication, the first problem in dealing with gestures is a relative scarcity of literature. The second problem is of terminological nature. Some of the terms need to be adjusted for talking about gestures, which is why *communicator* and *addressee* are used whenever applicable, instead of *speaker* and *listener*. Although there are multiple classifications of hand gestures, a choice was made to categorise all of the gestures analysed into five types: *lexical*, *deictic*, *emblems*, *beats*, and *Butterworths*.

Six YouTube videos, i.e. two groups of three videos are analysed. The first group is online English conversation lessons with a teacher and her guest(s) as participants, and the second three are interviews, with the host and a famous actor as participants. The analysis has shown that the most widely used category of gestures is beats. What follows are deictic gestures. The most widely-used special kind of deictic gesture is the turn-keeping gesture. Less common are lexical gestures, followed by emblems and finally Butterworths. Mostly, communicators gestured in order to explain some event or situation to an addressee (be it a co-participant in the video or viewers, the audience,) which proves the thesis that gestures, for the most part, serve a communicative purpose, rather than some other, e.g. aiding in lexical retrieval. The first video shows that gesturing is not obligatory, but rather a matter of style of speech. Some people tend to gesture a lot, some not at all. Another matter of personal style is what is referred to here as “signature gesture,” usually when talking about beats. Some people chop air with their palms, some hold their fingers in the *mano a borsa* position, for instance. Through gestures people can show their emotions, too. It is possible to do that along with speech, e.g. building up the pace of speech and gestures, or independent of speech, e.g. to show shame, people cover their face. Whereas it is mostly true that people do not gesture when in the role of an addressee, there are exceptions to this. When an addressee (dis)agrees with the communicator, just like they nod or wave their head, they occasionally make a hand gesture. Often when people see a behaviour they like, just like an animal, they subconsciously *mirror* it. This phenomenon is popularly called the *Monkey see, monkey do* behaviour.

The body of linguistic literature on co-speech hand gestures is not large, and two papers not always agree with one another. Researchers who dealt and have been dealing with this topic mostly do participant-based analytic research, but due to the present circumstances this was not

an option for this paper, too. Therefore, this corpus of six videos was chosen. More work on the topic needs to be done, that would summarise the theories and suggest terminology to ensure consistency for future research on non-verbal communication.

## **SUMMARY AND KEY WORDS**

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that deals with language in use and the contexts in which it is used. One of the main kinds of contexts of use of language is communication. Communication consists of verbal mode, or language, and nonverbal mode, which denotes facial expressions, gestures, body language (position or movement), touch, eye contact, etc., in other words, anything that we can convey a message with that is not language in its written or oral form. This thesis deals with the use of hand gestures that occur in parallel with spoken words. Since linguists have mostly dealt with verbal communication, terminology for this mode is well-established, and terminology for talking about non-verbal communication needs to be adjusted from it. Most importantly, the nouns *communicator* and *addressee* are used whenever applicable, instead of *speaker* and *listener*. Another problem with terminology encountered in the scientific literature on gestures is the fact that different authors have different terms for the same phenomenon. A choice was made, and although there are up to four names for the same category of gestures, only one was used in the analysis. There are multiple classifications of hand gestures, but the simplest, most complete one, is a modification of Charles Peirce's classification of signs. David McNeill adopts it, modifies it, and categorises hand gestures into: *lexical*, *deictic*, *emblems*, *beats*, and the so-called *Butterworths*. Six YouTube videos, or two groups of three videos in each, were analysed. The first group is online English conversation lessons with a teacher and her guest(s) as participants, and the second three are interviews, with the host and a famous actor as participants. The analysis has shown that the most widely used category of gestures is beats. What follows are deictic gestures. The most widely-used special kind of deictic gesture is the turn-keeping gesture. Less common are lexical gestures, followed by emblems and finally Butterworths.

Pragmatics – Hand gestures – Co-speech gestures – Video analysis – Case study

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## WEB SOURCES

### Links to videos:

#### Example 1

English Conversation - Daily Routine (with vocabulary) -  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KsaJcKUVv0w&ab\\_channel=EnglishwithLucy](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KsaJcKUVv0w&ab_channel=EnglishwithLucy)

#### Example 2

Talking about LOVE in English ❤️❤️❤️ Idioms & Phrasal Verbs | ft. Mark Rosenfeld  
 - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zIn8kn8Jwk&ab\\_channel=mmmEnglish](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zIn8kn8Jwk&ab_channel=mmmEnglish)

#### Example 3

Lesson 104 🗣️ Basic English with Jennifer - Talking about Favorites & the Past -  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIxN4WqtI84&ab\\_channel=JenniferESL](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIxN4WqtI84&ab_channel=JenniferESL)

#### Example 4

a) Robert Downey Jr Contemplates the Next Phase of His Life After Marvel  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4FQI2BI3hw&list=PL3AUS4PSeKCQSjY9BDcIXtJxcOgOR9aUY&index=2&ab\\_channel=theoffcamerashow](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4FQI2BI3hw&list=PL3AUS4PSeKCQSjY9BDcIXtJxcOgOR9aUY&index=2&ab_channel=theoffcamerashow)

b) Robert Downey Jr Describes the Balancing Act of Personalities on a Film Set

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oe8WLh3SdB8&list=PL3AUS4PSeKCQSjY9BDcIXtJxcOgOR9aUY&index=3&ab\\_channel=theoffcamerashow](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oe8WLh3SdB8&list=PL3AUS4PSeKCQSjY9BDcIXtJxcOgOR9aUY&index=3&ab_channel=theoffcamerashow)

c) Robert Downey Jr Recounts His Time on Saturday Night Live

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-FIS5uvM4U&list=PL3AUS4PSeKCQSjY9BDcIXtJxcOgOR9aUY&index=7&ab_channel=theoffcamerashow)

[FIS5uvM4U&list=PL3AUS4PSeKCQSjY9BDcIXtJxcOgOR9aUY&index=7&ab\\_channel=theoffcamerashow](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-FIS5uvM4U&list=PL3AUS4PSeKCQSjY9BDcIXtJxcOgOR9aUY&index=7&ab_channel=theoffcamerashow)

d) Robert Downey Jr Finds More than Validation from His Wife Susan Downey

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6NsBQBjpDw&list=PL3AUS4PSeKCQSjY9BDcIXtJxcOgOR9aUY&index=8&ab\\_channel=theoffcamerashow](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6NsBQBjpDw&list=PL3AUS4PSeKCQSjY9BDcIXtJxcOgOR9aUY&index=8&ab_channel=theoffcamerashow)

#### Example 5

a) Kristen Bell Explains There Is No Shame In Feeling Anxiety & Depression  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYUQ\\_nlZgWE&t=1s&ab\\_channel=theoffcamerashow](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYUQ_nlZgWE&t=1s&ab_channel=theoffcamerashow)

b) Kristen Bell: "I Feel Like I'm Going To Explode"  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocYchf\\_4vn4&t=10s&ab\\_channel=theoffcamerashow](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocYchf_4vn4&t=10s&ab_channel=theoffcamerashow)

c) Kristen Bell: "I Grew Up Thinking The World Was Black & White"  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mp\\_2d1xnW9w&t=1s&ab\\_channel=theoffcamerashow](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mp_2d1xnW9w&t=1s&ab_channel=theoffcamerashow)

d) Kristen Bell's Middle School Crush... Maybe  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5FKuhAMcVw&t=1s&ab\\_channel=theoffcamerashow](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5FKuhAMcVw&t=1s&ab_channel=theoffcamerashow)

#### Example 6

a) David Tennant Fights the Demon of Imposter Syndrome  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3sBA0RWPAbY&ab\\_channel=theoffcamerashow](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3sBA0RWPAbY&ab_channel=theoffcamerashow)

b) David Tennant's Shock from the Loss of Anonymity Due to Doctor Who  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GPDNPiLXuW&t=1s&ab\\_channel=theoffcamerashow](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GPDNPiLXuW&t=1s&ab_channel=theoffcamerashow)

c) Can 'The Doctor' Play Hamlet? David Tennant and the World Hold Their Breath  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Yg\\_tRqnRuI&t=8s&ab\\_channel=theoffcamerashow](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Yg_tRqnRuI&t=8s&ab_channel=theoffcamerashow)

d) David Tennant Fantasized About Being Doctor Who Since He was a Kid  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MRak9xdgRI&t=1s&ab\\_channel=theoffcamerashow](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MRak9xdgRI&t=1s&ab_channel=theoffcamerashow)



Links to YouTube channels:

English with Lucy

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCz4tgANd4yy8Oe0iXCdSWfA>

JenniferESL

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIxN4WqtI84&ab\\_channel=JenniferESL](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIxN4WqtI84&ab_channel=JenniferESL)

mmmEnglish

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrRiVfHqBIIvSgKmgnsY66g>

The Off Camera Show

<https://www.youtube.com/c/theoffcamerashow/featured>

Other:

Gesture journal <http://gesturestudies.com/index.php/publications/journal-gesture/>