Imperatives in sign languages and the quest for reproachatives

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The imperative was till recently one of the grammatical categories in sign languages still lacking any kind of basic description. Within the COST Action IS1006 project *SignGram*, a first step was taken towards its characterization in several European sign languages, using the grammar writing tool *SignGram Blueprint*. As a result of that initiative the first crosslinguistic study of sign language imperatives was carried out (Donati et al. in press). The first part of the talk summarizes the properties identified in LIS, LSC and LSF (Italian, Catalan and French Sign Language, respectively) that allow us to establish the imperative as a grammatical category in itself.

Reproachative expressions are constructed in some of the languages that realize them as imperatives: Spanish resorts to a perfect infinitival (retrospective imperatives in Bosque 1980), for instance, and Palestinian Arabic to a past auxiliary combined with the morphological imperative (Karawani apud van Olmen 2016). In the second part of the talk I will present fresh evidence from Catalan Sign Language (LSC) showing that, although not all languages have a dedicated expression realizing reproachatives, this sign language realizes it as an imperative. The basic markings are those that we encounter in regular commands: the nonmanuals associated with command imperatives (furrowed brows) and at the manual level the modification of the movement properties of the predicate (tense, short movement). The language does not mark morphological past tense, but a manual marker of anteriority (BEFORE) is also attested in some examples of this reproachative expressions, bringing them close to the Spanish perfect infinitival case. It must be noted that reprimands can also be uttered as deontic modal statements with the modal sign BETTER; however, they do not show the properties of imperatives but rather of regular declaratives. Reproachative imperatives in LSC can also be shown not to be related to elliptical conditionals (cf. Biezma 2010 for Spanish). To my knowledge, this is the first description of reproachatives in a sign language. As in spoken languages, we do not expect sign languages to have a dedicated form to express this meaning, but this first description highlights the fact that, when present, they resort to the same set of grammatical ingredients as the ones identified in spoken languages (van Olmen 2016).