

Manual gestures of agreement in Greek conversation: The role of gender and familiarity

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Agreement between interlocutors is an ordinary aspect of talk-in-interaction. Although previous research has examined agreement in speech (e.g., Makri-Tsilipakou, 1991; Myers, 1998; Pomerantz, 1984), the multimodal expression of agreement has received less attention. Those studies that have investigated multimodal expressions of agreement have predominantly focused on head movements, especially nodding (e.g., Fusaro et al., 2011; Guidetti, 2005; Helweg-Larsen et al., 2004). Less is known about manual gestures of agreement. Regarding gender and familiarity, it has been reported that females tend to gesture more both with familiars and unfamiliars, while males are generally more restrictive (Bente et al., 1998; Friesen et al., 1979; Helweg-Larsen et al., 2004). However, these studies have not examined agreement specifically. This study therefore investigates the expression of agreement asking a) what manual agreement gestures look like, and b) whether interlocutors' gender and familiarity with the speaker affects the frequency and form of such gestures.

We recruited 40 native Greek speakers (20 females) to participate in an elicitation task in which pairs of speakers discussed a set topic. The participants were distributed in eight different groups that each consisted of five speakers. One was selected as the target speaker (8 in total; 4 female) and was paired with two familiar and two unfamiliar interlocutors, one male, one female in each familiarity category (Fig. 1). Speech from 32 conversations was transcribed and agreement utterances were selected. The manual gestures that occurred within these utterances were identified and further coded for articulatory features: number of hands, movement, palm orientation and handshape.

The results show few differences between the genders in agreement speech. In gesture, both genders produce manual gestures in agreement with similar characteristics, mainly the Open Hand Palm Up and Palm Up Oblique gestures (Fig. 2) across all conditions. Turning to gender and familiarity, female speakers gesture more than male speakers in all conditions, as in previous studies. In addition, both female and male speakers produce most gestures with unfamiliar male interlocutors. The results provide new knowledge about multimodal expressions of agreement, and the findings on gender and familiarity suggest a need for further systematic studies to chart the influence of social factors on multimodal pragmatics.

Index terms: agreement, conversation, manual gestures, speech, Greek, gender, familiarity.

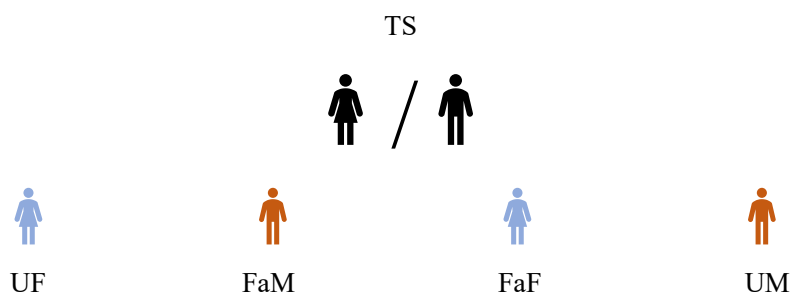


Figure 1: *The internal structure of the groups. TS=target speaker, FaF=familiar female, FaM=familiar male, UF=unfamiliar female, UM=unfamiliar male.*



Figure 2. a) *Palm Up gesture as performed by a female target speaker. b) Palm Up Oblique gesture as performed by a male target speaker.*

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