Pragmatics is concerned with the relation of linguistic items to their context of utterance, their users and interpreters, that is, with context-dependent aspects of meaning. Studies in pragmatics also recognize that non-verbal communication mechanisms (including gestures), alongside verbal aspects of communication, are at the core of the creation of meaning in the interaction context (Payrató, 2009: 175). Given this context-sensitive and multimodal view of pragmatics, we define pragmatic gestures (Streeck, 2009) as being formally heterogeneous, multifunctional, mostly non-representational and unintentional visible actions in language interaction. Pragmatic gestures express “aspects of utterance structure, including the status of discourse segments with respect to one another, and the character of the ‘speech act’ or interactional move of the utterance” (Kendon, 1995: 247). Along the lines of previous research on constructionalized pragmatic markers in speech (Bolly, 2014; Travis & Torres Cacoullos, 2014), we suggest tackling pragmatic gesturing in terms of continua from idiosyncratic uses to more conventionalized ones.

The aim of the present talk is to answer the following questions: to what extent non-representational gestures with a pragmatic function are conventionalized, both in spoken languages (SpLs) and sign languages (SLs)? and to what extent their uses in later life can be seen as age-related phenomena? To answer the first question, we hypothesize that pragmatic gestures are multimodal constructions insofar as they consist in learned pairings of (patterns of) form with discourse function (Goldberg, 2006: 5). To answer the second question, we hypothesize that there can be an impact of some age-related changes (e.g., slowing of information processing, arthritis, deficits in inhibitory mechanisms, etc. – see Burke & Shafto, 2004) on the use of gesture, both in hearing and deaf older persons.

The first part of our talk concentrates on a multimodal corpus-based study of spoken French that explores the function of pragmatic gestures in audio-video data taken from the CorpAGEst corpus (Bolly & Boutet, forthcoming – 16.8 hrs; approx. 250,000 words). In line with form-based approaches to gesture (Müller et al., 2013), relations that exist between discourse markers and nonverbal pragmatic markers are investigated in one 75-year-old speaker (Nadine). Particular attention is paid to clusters and recurrent combinations of (non)verbal parameters (e.g., gaze direction, head shake, hand location in the subjective space, occurrence of discourse marker, etc.). Some tendencies emerged. For instance, when combined with head moves, discourse markers tend to convey expressive meanings in Nadine’s speech, but have less chance to be interactive (this is also true for pragmatic hand gestures, but in a less significant manner). Furthermore, comparing planning and common-ground right-hand gestures in Nadine’s interaction, it appeared that the former preferably cluster with fillers and interjections (e.g., *pf, euh ‘ur’*), while the latter mostly occur with parentheticals and connectives (e.g., *je (te) dis, et*). Planning gestures also frequently integrate micro-movements, whereas common-ground hand gestures are wider external moves. Again, planning hand gestures differ from common-ground gestures, insofar as they often co-occur with a self-contact with another body part or an object, head turns, and vague gaze; whereas common-ground gestures are mostly produced with simultaneous gaze addressed to the interlocutor in a straightforward direction.
The second part of our talk focuses on the results that emerged from a crosslinguistic analysis in spoken French and French Belgian Sign Language (LSFB). As a starting point, it is assumed that, in contrast with SpLs, SLs offer the unique property to grammaticalize both manual and nonmanual gestures (Herrmann & Steinbach, 2013). To foster knowledge on this issue, palm-up gestures are investigated (among others, Kendon, 2004; Müller, 2004; McKee & Wallington 2012; van Loon, 2012) in combination with nonmanuals, comparing their more or less pragmatically used in Belgian spoken French and LSFB. The corpus data comprise four samples of video data (duration: approx. 15 min.) that are made up of interviews with two hearing French-speaking women (75 and 84 y. old; CorpAGEst corpus – Bolly, 2013) and two deaf LSFB-signing men (75 and 84 y. old; LSFB corpus – Meurant, 2015). Results show that the four informants vary in their way of producing palm-ups in combination with nonmanuals, including facial displays, gaze, head moves, and shoulders’ moves. For instance, palm-ups that convey attitudinal meaning are mostly expressed, in our SL data, by means of two-handed palm-ups combined with a non-addressed gaze and closed mouth, while in SpL they can be one-handed or two-handed, and mostly combine with back-and-forth gazing, eye-closing, eyebrow raising, and head turns. Interestingly, these combinations also appeared to be more conventionalized in signers than in speakers.

Altogether, in light of these two multimodal video-based experiments, we finally point out that language variation and idiosyncratic uses can be viewed as constituting the central object of research in language aging, as being “the entering wedge for discovering the invariant, the system viewed as a living entity, an entity which takes shape and evolves through use, through the speakers as members of a group sharing a culture and a vision of the world” (Cuenca, 2003: 7). Cuenca’s view appears to be highly relevant when exploring language in later life, since individual variation becomes even more pronounced in old age (Gerstenberg, 2015: 316), when compared to previous stages in the lifespan.

References
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Bio-note

Dr. Catherine T. Bolly is a research associate at the University of Cologne and member of the Sociolinguistic Lab (Chair: Prof. A. Adli). She is also scientific collaborator at the University of Louvain for several years (Valibel – Discours & Variation; Louvain4Ageing consortium). Catherine T. Bolly is the co-founder of the CLARe network (Corpora for Language and Aging Research) and the main investigator of the CorpAGEst Marie Curie project (FP7/PIEF-GA-2012-328282; 2013-2015). Her current interests lie in the study of language in later life from a socio-pragmatic angle. Adopting a corpus-based methodology, the focus is on discourse markers and pragmatic gestures which help in structuring discourse, as in expressing emotion and stance. She wrote several publications in the field of discourse, phraseology and grammaticalization, among others one major monograph (*Phraséologie et collocations. Approche sur corpus en français L1 et L2*, P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2011).

Silvia Gabarró-López is a research fellow for the F.R.S.-FNRS at the University of Namur. She started her PhD thesis on “Buoys and discourse markers in French Belgian Sign Language (LSFB) and Catalan Sign Language (LSC)” in 2012 and from then has actively participated in several international conferences. Her research interests include discourse analysis, sign language linguistics, corpus linguistics and sign language interpreting. She has been involved in the LSFB Corpus project as a scientific collaborator and as a translator of the video-data from LSFB to French. In addition to her scientific activities, she has also worked as English teacher for deaf students (2012-2015) in the “co-enrolment” bilingual project set in Namur (Sainte-Marie School).

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**Keywords:** Multimodality, gesture-sign interface, language functions, corpus annotation, aging.