

Title: ‘Away’ gestures associated with negative expressions in narrative discourse in Syuba (Kagate, Nepal) speakers

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Biographical note

Lauren Gawne is a linguist who works on the documentation and description of Tibeto-Burman languages, with an areal focus in Nepal. Lauren’s work specifically explores the use of gesture and evidentiality. Lauren was awarded a PhD from the University of Melbourne in 2013, and is currently a David Myers Research Fellow at La Trobe University, Melbourne. She has also held research fellowships at Nanyang Technological University, and SOAS University of London.

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Abstract

This article examines the formal and functional features of a recurring ‘away’ gesture in Syuba (Tibeto-Burman, Nepal). The formal properties of this gesture include a pronation of the forearms to bring the palms downward while the fingers spread away, and is most often performed with both hands. Functionally, it is found with utterances that signal negation, particularly the absence of something. A growing body of literature links ‘away’ trajectories with negation, or negative evaluation of speech content cross-linguistically. The temporal alignment between these gesture and lexical content also shows that cross-linguistic differences in word order appear to affect performance of gestures associated with negated content.

Key words: Gesture, Tibetic, Discourse, Co-Speech, Negation

1 Introduction

Research on recurrent gestural forms with a pragmatic function—those gestures relating to conversational or grammatical structure, rather than the referential content—is often grounded in an attempt to understand the embodied motivation for such actions. For example, an upturned open hand can offer the propositional content (Kendon 2004: 264-281) or show deference (Givens 2016) to the interlocutor, and the thumb and index finger brought together in a ring indicates some kind of exactitude (Neumann 2004; Kendon 2004: 238-247). Another example of recurrent gestures that frequently show a particular function are those where an away trajectory is associated with some kind of negation. The correspondence between negation in the spoken content and an away movement in gesture has been observed in other languages (Kendon 2004; Harrison 2010; Bresse and Müller 2014b, and others discussed in Section 2.1). This ‘gesture family’ (as per Kendon 2004: 227) has been observed cross-linguistically, and involves a number of sub-types that all have a similar formal feature, a form of movement away from the speaker, and some kind of pragmatic function of marking negation.

In this paper I describe a particular recurrent gesture with an away trajectory which is used by speakers of Syuba, a Tibeto-Burman language of Nepal. This gesture involves the pronation of the forearms, often coupled with a slight extension of the wrist, and an outward splaying of the fingers, which often remain only loosely extended. In this article I look at the context of use of the gesture, and find that it is aligned with a negated noun phrase in speech, often a negative indefinite pronoun, such as ‘nothing’. This work furthers our understanding of the functional relationship between negation and away gestures, and provides some of the first systematic documentation of pragmatic gesture in the Tibeto-Burman family, and the South Asian area.

Example (1) provides an illustration of the gesture, and speech context in which the gesture is performed. The gesture is performed twice in this utterance. Figure 1 is a still of the video at the stroke (peak of articulation) of the first gesture. Note that the

fingers are not fully extended. As for all examples in this article, the preparation (~~~), stroke (peak of the gesture), and hold (***) and recovery (-.-.) are illustrated.¹

- 1) ~~~~~*****-.-.-~~~~~*****
ná làm rod myà ná bothi myà
 else road road(Eng) NEG.COP else light(Nep) NEG.COP
 ‘there is also no road, there is also no electricity.’
 (Jit Bahadur 140127-02 0:33, Tokens 3 and 4)



Figure 1 Jit Bahadur at the stroke of an away gesture (140127-02 0:35, Tokens 3 and 4)

This gesture stroke and hold aligns with the negation, and serves to indicate the absence of the item being referred to. I then examine the function features of the away gesture, (Section 3), including analysis of the lexical content this gesture occurs with, and the temporal alignment between the gesture and grammatical negation. Before this I begin with an overview of the literature that links negation with gestural actions away from the body (Section 1.1) and introduce the Syuba language, including the corpus of materials that provide the foundation for this paper and the grammar of negation (Section 1.2). In Section 4 I compare the analysis of the Syuba gesture to discussion in the literature, and argue that while the away gestures used by Syuba speakers are similar to those described in the existing literature, they also present a distinct variation on the relationship between ‘away’ and negation.

1.1 Negation and the away trajectory

There is a growing body of literature that demonstrates a relationship cross-linguistically between negation in speech and some form of away movement in the corresponding gesture. What unites all of this work is the trajectory of movement ‘away’ from the centre of the speaker’s gestural space. Functionally, these gestures are not referential, they do not depict the trajectory of an object, concrete or abstract, but

¹ These are the same annotation conventions as used in Kendon (2004, see p. 114).

instead act as ‘pragmatic’ gestures, operating on the grammatical or interactional structure. (Kendon 1995; Kendon 2004: 158). These gestures can be considered ‘recurrent gestures’ (Ladewig 2014), in that they have not reached the same degree of conventionalisation as emblems, and are still used in concert with spoken content, but are not as idiosyncratic in form or distribution as, for example, iconic gestures.

A relationship between negation and an away gesture trajectory has been observed in major European languages, including English (Kendon 2004; Harrison 2010; Streeck 2009), Italian (Kendon 2004), French (Calbris 2011: 198-202), Spanish (Teßendorf 2014) and German (Bressem and Müller 2014a). Outside of this cluster of languages, there are two papers on Savosavo, a Papuan language of the Solomon Islands (Bressem et al. 2015; Bressem et al. 2017) that look at the relationship between negation and away gestures. Brookes’s (2004) survey of conventionalised ‘quotable’ gestures in the repertoire of black urban South Africans (speakers of Zulu, South Sotho and Iscamtho in the province of Gauteng) also includes a gesture of holding away that was used for ‘wait’ (negating the interlocutors chance to take the floor) and a sweeping away ‘finished’ gesture. There is still a great deal of scope for cross-linguistic contributions to the understanding of the relationship between negation and away gestures.

These gestures have been further subcategorised by Bressem and Müller (2014b) into specific negation functions based on handshape or orientation. Bressem and Müller draw on their own corpus of German, and much the literature above, to outline four major categories within the larger family of away gestures. For all of these, the away movement is central, but the handshape and orientation correspond with different functions. The first is ‘sweeping away’, made with an open, prone hand. Bressem and Müller (2014b: 1597) argue that the gesture indicates negation through the action of clearing something completely from the bodily space, and by extension the space of the conversation. Kendon (2004: 255) refers to these as ‘Open Hand Prone (horizontal palm)’ gestures, focusing on the orientation of the palm, rather than the ‘away’ trajectory. The second is ‘holding away’, refusing or stopping a topic from being in the speaker’s personal space and therefore by extension negating it from the interaction. Kendon (2004: 248) observes that in both the Italian and English data he analysed a holding away gesture (‘Open Hand Prone (vertical palm)’ was used to denote something “denied, negated, interrupted, or stopped”. The third is ‘brushing away’, which involves a lax hand with the wrist rotated so that the palms face outwards from the speaker. The dismissive nature of this movement as a physical action, flicking away small things, is extended to dismissing topics or beliefs, indicating a ‘negative assessment’ of the content. In a discussion of Spanish, Teßendorf (2014) notes that the brushing aside gesture indicates negative stance towards the discursive object. The fourth is ‘throwing away’, where the hand is quickly brought down - as with throwing a small object, the idea is removed from the conversational space. It therefore shares a dismissive ‘negative assessment’ element with the ‘brushing away’ type. Not all of these types are presumed to occur in all languages, for example, Bressem et al. (2015) and Bressem et al. (2017) draw on a video corpus of Savosavo and conclude that away gestures used in the language correspond to the ‘sweeping away’ and ‘holding away’ categories, with ‘brushing away’ and ‘throwing away’ not represented.

Pragmatic gestures can have different functions in relation to the speech context (Kendon 2004: 225). Although there is a common theme of ‘negation’ in all of the analyses above, the level of the utterance on which the negation operates is not always

the same. They can have a performative function, where they are used with grammatically negative structures, and serve to highlight or emphasize the negative value. In the Syuba recordings in this paper, the particular away gesture that is analysed is used only with grammatically negative forms. This is not the case for all ‘away’ trajectory gestures cross-linguistically. Calbris (2011: 199-200) observes that in French some away gestures can show a negating stance with a dismissive quality. Kendon (2004: 258-259) observes uses in Italian where the speaker says something that is a universal statement that excludes all other possibilities, or demonstrates strong positive assessment, with the gesture negating all possible alternatives. In these examples the gesture has a modal function, demonstrating speaker stance towards the discourse content.

Bressem and Müller (2014b: 1603) suggest that the relationship between negation and away trajectory gestures demonstrates an embodied basis for human understanding of negation. This contributes to the larger body of theoretical work that seeks to understand the human cognitive faculty as deeply embedded in our physical interaction with the world (Langacker 1987; Lakoff 1987; Lakoff and Johnson 1980, in gesture see Mittelberg 2008). Bressem and Müller (2014b: 1596) argue for the embodied basis of ‘away’ as negation as an action scheme:² “[t]he effect that all actions have in common is that the body space is cleared of annoying or otherwise unwanted objects”.

There is almost no research on gestural repertoires of speakers of Tibeto-Burman languages, let alone work that focuses on recurrent pragmatic gestures.³ There is also no prior work on gesture use in Nepal, or the larger South Asian area, other than Dasen et al.’s (2009) work in Bali, India and Nepal, which uses geocentric gestures as a research tool as part of a larger study on tracking reference. This study therefore provides an illustration of the relationship between negation and away gestures in a previously under-studied region and language family.

1.2 The Syuba language and corpus

Syuba is a Tibeto-Burman language, spoken by approximately 1500 people in Nepal (ISO 639-3 syw). The traditional villages of Syuba speakers are in the Ramechhap district of Nepal, although many speakers now also live in urban centres, such as Kathmandu, and abroad. Syuba speakers are all multilingual, using Nepali as the language of interaction with people outside their villages. Almost all children in the villages speak Syuba as their first language, with formal education in Nepali (Mitchell and Eichentopf 2013).

The language is of the Tibetic group (Tournadre 2014) and is closely related to Yolmo (ISO 639-3 scp) (Gawne 2013), and more distantly to Sherpa and Standard Tibetan. Historically, the group and their language have been known by the exonym *Kagate* (Grierson 1909[1966]; Höhlig and Hari 1976; Höhlig 1978). I have been working with Syuba speakers since 2009, and the video-recordings that form forms the

² In this article I use the term ‘action scheme’ as per Bressem and Müller (2014a, 2014b, 2017, see also Bressem et al. 2015, 2017). Their action scheme serves the same function as ‘image scheme’, discussed in the cognitive semantics literature, where the meaning of pragmatic gestures are “derived from the underlying action scheme” (Bressem and Müller 2014b: 1596). ‘Action scheme’ has the advantage of being motivated by dynamic motion rather than static image.

³ There is an unpublished study on the relationship between stroke of gesture and prominent word in utterances in Pwo Karen, spoken in southeastern Burma and northern Thailand (Hsieh 2012).

basis of the analysis in this paper are part of a broader Syuba language documentation project (Gawne 2009, 2017).

The gestures analysed in this paper come from 144 minutes of recordings collected in 2014 with six participants. The topic of the recordings reflect what each individual wished to speak about, which was usually a traditional story, historical narrative, or song. Transcriptions were made in ELAN (Sloetjes and Wittenburg 2008),⁴ speech was glossed using the Leipzig glossing rules (Bickel et al. 2008) and translated into English. Gestures were coded as relevant based on the formal features discussed in Section 2, with an away trajectory through pronation of the forearm and a brushing outwards of the hands or fingers being primary considerations. Features of the speech context were also taken into account, particularly for gestures that were underspecified in their performance.

All examples in this paper from Syuba are cited with a reference code, which directs the interested reader to the original recording. The reference code is based on the date the recording was made, so 141022-01 was the first recording made on the 22nd of October, 2014. Full recordings are archived with Paradisec (Gawne, 2009)⁵ and ELAR,⁶ and are accessible to anyone who creates an account with the site and agrees to the terms of use.⁷ The ELAN transcription files are also included in the online archives. The SUY1 prefix is used to locate the files in the Paradisec archive. Participants are not anonymised, as these recordings are openly available and Syuba speakers who participated in these recordings did so because they wanted to share their language.

There were thirteen tokens of the away gestures in the recordings.⁸ Four of the six speakers used the away gesture. Table 1 gives a summary of the thirteen tokens, including the file name, timecode and the speaker. The speech each gestures occurs with is also given, with brackets indicating the broad alignment between the gesture and the speech, and a translation in English.

Token number	Speaker	File	Start (m:s)	end (m:s)	duration (s)	speech	translation
1	Jit Bahadur	SUY1-140127-02	00:22.9	00:25.0	2.1	tà [teín myàn tà]	now there is nothing
2			00:25.3	00:26.6	1.3	[làmla làm] myà	the paths aren't roads
3			00:33.8	00:35.0	1.2	ná [làmla road myà]	there is also no road
4			00:35.0	00:36.3	1.2	nà [bothi myà]	there is also no electricity
5	Pasang Maya	SUY1-140128-02	06:00.1	06:01.4	1.3	[teín myà]	there is nothing
6			06:04.2	06:06.2	2.0	[nàidi dèla] teín myà	I have nothing here
7	Larkel	SUY1-	0:01:35	0:01:36	1.0	[sù myàn]	there is nobody

⁴ <http://tla.mpi.nl/tools/tla-tools/elan/> Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, The Language Archive, Nijmegen, The Netherlands.

⁵ <http://catalog.paradisec.org.au/collections/SUY1>

⁶ <http://elar.soas.ac.uk/deposit/0388>

⁷ All data in this paper are available under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License unless copyright is otherwise specified

⁸ Bressem & Müller (2017) analysed 34 hours of recordings and found 75 tokens of what they call the 'throwing away' gesture in German from 24 speakers. Although their corpus was larger, there is a similar frequency and distribution of the target gesture.

		141010-02					
8			02:23.0	02:24.1	1.5	[sàbdza myà]	there was no food
9	Sangbu	SUY1-141022-01	01:32.8	01:34.1	1.3	òole òodidi [teín dzòdi myàn]	and then there was nothing
10		SUY1-141022-03	00:45.4	00:47.9	2.5	[teín mèkyòn]ke	nothing would grow
11			01:30.7	01:32.9	2.2	hèe mài [teí mèkyòn]ke	potatoes, corn, nothing grows
12			02:54.1	02:56.4	2.3	[teín myàke]	there was nothing
13			04:01.9	04:04.1	2.2	reldza [reldza myàke] nìidila yùlla thé mèkhyòndi	there wasn't soy, millet doesn't grow in our village

Table 1 Summary of the tokens included in this analysis

Short clips of each of the tokens are available through FigShare, listed by token number.⁹

Grammatically, negation in Syuba is marked with either one of two verb prefixes, or a negative copula verb. The negative prefixes are *mè-* (non-past) and *mà-* (past, imperative) and attach to the main lexical verb, or an auxiliary verb that marks aspect or epistemic mode. There are a number of negative copula forms, but in this set the only one to occur is *myà*, the negative equivalent of the non-past existential copula form *yè*, as well as the past tense form *myàke*. The mildly emphatic suffix *-ŋ* is also sometimes included to give *myànŋ*. Indefinite pronominal forms (nothing, no one), which are commonly used with the away gesture in this collection, are formed using the interrogative pronoun and a negative copula, e.g. *teí myà* (what NEG) ‘nothing’ and *sù myà* (who NEG) ‘no one’. Syuba is verb final, which is relevant to the discussion of the alignment of gesture with speech in Section 3.2.

It should also be noted that the away gesture discussed here is only part of a larger repertoire of negation strategies and away gestures in the language. For example, in (2), while talking Larkel shakes his head with a rotation from side to side, while also using a gesture that involves holding away and waving the hands. Here, what is negated is the possibility of an action.

- 2) ~~~*****_.....
 jilla *dò* *mè-khú* *yè*
 headquarters go NEG-can COP
 ‘cannot go the district head-quarters’
 (Larkel SUY1-141010-02 8:30, Token 14)

⁹ <http://doi.org/10.4225/22/5ae7f1049f846>





Figure 3 Sangbu left, stroke of the gesture with (3) (141022-03 2:53), right, stroke of the gesture with (4) (141022-03 2:54, Token 12)

This paper focuses specifically on the away gesture that is used to indicate the absence of someone or something. This gesture type has been selected because this particular use of an away trajectory with negation has not yet been discussed in the existing literature.

2 Form of the gesture

In this section I focus on the form of the away gesture. I start with the trajectory of the gesture (Section 2.1), as the away motion is what ties this gesture to the literature in Section 1.1. I then look at the handshape (Section 2.2), which has features that are not yet discussed in the literature for away gestures. I also briefly look at orientation of the hands during the gesture (Section 2.3), the preference for two-handed performance of the away gesture (Section 2.4) and the performance of the gesture in the lower periphery of the gesture space (Section 2.5).

No two speakers necessarily perform these gestures exactly the same way, and even an individual speaker may vary their performance. Therefore, in this section, the emphasis is not on describing a canonical performance of the gesture, but on understanding the commonality in how this gesture is performed. The form of this gesture is most like Bressemer and Müller's (2014b: 1598) 'brushing away' gesture, particularly with regards to the rotation in the trajectory, although there are a number of differences, which I discuss in the relevant sections.

2.1 Trajectory

The trajectory of the gesture is away from the speaker, and downwards, in a horizontal lateral direction rather than straight ahead. It is this trajectory 'away' from the gesturer (furthered by the fingers splaying outwards, as discussed in Section 2.2 below), that is central to the performance of this gesture, and to the negating function, discussed in Section 3. This is accomplished by a pronation of the forearms, and often a slight

extension of the wrist, as well an extension of the fingers. Of the speakers analysed, Larkel provides the most overly performed gestures. In Figure 4 we see an outward movement of the upper arms, and the full extension of the fingers.



Figure 4 Larkel at the onset and stroke (SUY1-141010-02 01:35, 01:36, Token 7)

This example is the largest movement of the arms for the performance of this gesture in this corpus. Often the away gesture is performed in a much smaller space, and may only include a slight pronation of the forearms, or extension of the fingers. Compare the start and end points of the performance of the gesture in Figure 5, In this example, there is very slight forearm pronation and extension of the wrist and only the fingers splaying outwards gives the ‘away’ trajectory.



Figure 5 Sangbu at the onset and stroke (SUY1-141022-03 0:46, 0:47, Token 10)

There are examples that show even less articulation than Sangbu's in Figure 5. Pasang Maya's gesture in Figure 6 has a slightly unusual trajectory. Her hands start in a palm-supine orientation, from a previous gesture, in which the hands were rotated to the opine position.¹⁰ The trajectory downward in the forearm pronation does not extend as far as for other speakers, nor do her fingers splay open. This is possibly because the range of gestural movement is constrained by her cross-legged seating position. Pasang Maya then held that position until the phrase *ṇàidi dèla teín myà* "I have nothing here". I have included this marginal example to demonstrate that gestures of this type can be very minimal in their performance. It is likely that there are other examples of this type that were missed during the coding process.



Figure 6 Pasang Maya at the onset and stroke (SUY1-140128-02 6:05, 6:06, Token 6)

Regardless of how large or small the performance of the gesture is, the trajectory is always away from the speaker, which is indicated though downward and outward movement. The centrality of the 'away' trajectory to all performances of this gesture is what grounds this analysis in the existing literature on 'away' type gestures. The horizontal lateral movement is more like Kendon's (2004: 255) Open Hand Prone with horizontal palm than his Open Hand Prone with vertical palm, where the movement is in front of the speaker, rather than to the side. The main differences between the gesture used by the Syuba speakers, and Kendon's Open Hand Prone with horizontal palm is that the Syuba speakers show a pronation of the forearm, and the hand does not remain open.

2.2 Handshape

For the majority of the tokens in this corpus, the handshape starts with a loosely-held fist or bunching of the fingers, and ends with a more open handshape at the stroke.

¹⁰ The previous gesture was a palms rotated gesture, used to mark interrogatives, see Gawne (2016) for discussion of this gesture type.

Larkel has a distinct handshape at the apex of the stroke, and the hold. The palm prone orientation is still somewhat maintained, but the fingers are fully extended. Figure 4 shows this, and Figure 7 is the other token from Larkel, taken from the same narrative.



Figure 7 Larkel at the stroke (SUY1-141010-02 02:24, Token 8)

Both the trajectory and handshape of Larkel's gestures are more prominent than those of the other speakers, which may be a result of individual variation, or over-articulation as part of the 'performance' of recording. More typical is the handshape shown by Jit Bahadur in Figure 1, and Sangbu in Figure 3, with the fingers splayed, but not fully extended.

The outward extension of the fingers used by Syuba speakers is similar to the 'brushing away' gesture described by Bressem and Müller (2014b, 2017) for other languages, however Bressem and Müller's (2014b: 1598) describe a "lax flat hand" at the onset of the gesture, rather than the bunching most often seen in the Syuba data.

2.3 Orientation

As noted in the sections above, the final orientation of the palms in this gesture is downward. Larkel's extended hands in Figure 7 are still tilted forward slightly to give a downward angle to the gesture. More typical orientation of the hand at the stroke of the gesture can be seen in Figure 8, where Sangbu's hand is angled downwards.



Figure 8 Sangbu at the stroke of the gesture (SUY1-141022-01 01:34, Token 9)

The downward orientation is worth noting explicitly. Gestures that have a palm-up orientation are generally used to ‘present’ something, even an abstract concept, to the viewer (Kendon 2004: 264-281; Givens 2016).

2.4 Handedness

There is only one example of one-hand use of the away gesture in my examples from Syuba speakers. This example comes from Sangbu Syuba (Figure 9). This gesture is performed as part of a small string of one-handed gestures, with no return to a rest position in between.



Figure 9 One-handed away gesture (Sangbu 141022-03 2:54, Token 12) (also Figure 3)

There are four other uses of the away gesture by Sangbu where he uses two hands. My general observation is that one-handed performance of this gesture by Syuba speakers is not as common as two-handed performances, but analysis of the larger Syuba corpus would be needed to confirm this.

2.5 Position

The away gesture is usually performed quite low in the gesture space. Of all the uses in the figures above, only Larkel's exuberant and rather untypical gestures involve the hands rising above the line of the elbows (Figure 7). It is difficult to determine if this is something particular to this gesture and how it is performed, as many of their gestures in these videos are performed in the lower periphery of the speaker's gestural space. Bressem and Müller (2014b: 1598) noted that when used as pragmatic gestures, 'brushing away' gestures often occur in the periphery of the gesture space.

3 Negating function of the away gesture

With the common formal features of the recurrent away gesture type established, I examine its function in relation to speech. I begin by examining the spoken content with which the away gesture occurs, and what this can tell us about the function of the gesture (Section 3.1). I then discuss the temporal alignment between the gesture and the spoken content, to illustrate that this gesture is closely integrated with the negating node of the utterance (Section 3.2).

3.1 Negation of existence

In all of the examples analysed this gesture co-occurs with utterances that denote the non-existence of something. All speakers use it with some form of the utterance 'there is/was nothing', using the interrogative pronominal *tsi* 'what' and the negative copula *myà* to give an indefinite negative pronominal sense of '(is) nothing'. Other than this common refrain, speakers can use it for the indefinite person negative pronominal *sù myàŋ* 'no one' (5), indicating that it is not only the 'nothing' form it co-occurs with.

- 5) ~~~~~*****
 sù *myà-ŋ*
 who NEG.COP-EMPH
 'there is nobody.'
 (Larkel SUY1-141010-02 01:35, Token 7)

It is also used to indicate the absence of specific objects. In the examples from this corpus this includes *lām* 'roads' (6), *bothi* 'electricity/lights' (1), *sàbdza* 'food' and *reldza* 'soybeans'.

- 6) ~~~~~*****-.-.-.
 ná *lām* *rod* *myà*
 else road road(Eng) NEG.COP
 'there is also no road.'
 (Jit Bahadur SUY1-140127-01 00:33, Token 3)

There is also a set of uses where the indefinite negative pronominal is part of a lexical verb phrase, rather than a copula construction. These are used by Sangbu, talking about a period of poor crops during his childhood (7).

- 7) ~~~~~*****
hèe mài tɛí mè-kyòŋ-ke
 potato corn what NEG-grow-NON.PST
 ‘potato, corn, nothing grows.’
 (Sangbu SUY1-141022-03 01:30, Token 11)

The away gesture that is performed with all of these utterances highlights the absence of the thing that is being discussed. In a number of the tokens in this collection, we see that the gesture is used with utterances that have an emphatic *-ŋ* suffix on the interrogative pronoun or copula. Similarly, we see an exaggerated intonation contour used by Sangbu in many of his utterances with the away gesture, and structural repetition from Jit Bahadur with a repeated *ná* ‘also’. This gesture may therefore be more likely to occur in utterances where the speaker wants to make the negated value prominent. We see speakers doing this with emphatic particles, structural parallels and prosodic emphasis. The away gesture offers another resource.

Gestures with an away trajectory, but other handshapes, can be used iconically or deictically. In the corpus there is no indication of use of gestures with the formal features described in Section 2 being used with positive noun phrases, or in absence of speech. There is always a grammatically negating node, which is often co-timed with the stroke of the gesture.

3.2 *Alignment with spoken content*

The stroke of the away gesture aligns most often with the negating lexical node of the utterance. As this is a verb final language, it means that the stroke often aligns with the negation of the verb element at the end of the phrase, this means that there is content in the scope of the negation that is not included in the hold phase of the gesture.

Example 8 was also discussed above as Figures 3 and 9, but here I want to focus specifically on the temporal alignment between the gesture and spoken content. The preparation begins just before the speech, and the execution of the stroke aligns with the negating element of the utterance, in this case a negative copula form.

- 8) ~~~~~*****-.-
tɛí-ŋ myàke
 what-EMPH NEG.COP.PST
 ‘there was nothing.’
 (SL 141022-03 2:54, Token 12)

Temporal alignment is given for the other examples presented here, and the the broad temporal relationship between the utterance and the gesture is marked with square brackets in Table 1. The gesture onset always precedes the negative lexical item, so that the stroke of the gesture co-occurs with it. There are two examples in the corpus where this kind of alignment does not hold; one from Jit Bahadur (9) and one from Pasang Maya (10). These are diagrammed below.

- 9) ~~~~~*****-.-.-.-.-
ná làm=la làm myà
 else road=LOC road NEG.COP
 ‘the paths aren’t roads.’
 (lit. ‘also on the road there is no road’)
 (Jit Bahadur 140127-02 0:25, Token 2)
- 10) ~~~~~*****.-
ɲà=i-di dèla tɛi-ŋ myà
 1SG=GEN-FOC here what-EMPH NEG.COP
 ‘I have nothing here.’
 (Pasang Maya 140128-02 6:04, Token 6)

In both cases the stroke precedes the grammatically negative element. This may be related to the fact that for both speakers the trajectory was very minimal, Pasang Maya in (10) essentially performs a stroke that finishes in the rest position in her lap. In both of these examples the speaker holds their hands in the rest position through to the end of the negated gesture phrase.

The majority of uses demonstrate a broadly consistent temporal alignment. This conforms to Harrison’s (2010) analysis of timing of stroke in negative utterances in English, where speakers synchronise the stroke of the gesture with the node of the negative utterance. There is no evidence in the Syuba corpus to support Harrison’s observation that speakers performed a post-stroke hold throughout the scope. This is because Syuba is a verb final language, and there is less content within the scope of the negation that follows the verb. The away gesture analysed in this paper also occurs with negated nouns and indefinite negative pronouns, and these types of constructions do not tend to involve additional scope information. This indicates that there are cross-linguistic differences in the relationship between negative constructions and co-occurring gestures based on grammatical features of a particular language.

4 Discussion

The away gesture, as used by speakers of Syuba, fits within the larger body of literature in which gestures with recurrent forms that include an away trajectory have a negating function. In the Syuba data we see a pronation of the forearm and splaying of the fingers, used with instances of ‘nothingness’ to indicate the lack of either something specific or a general deficit.

While there is a cross-linguistic literature on the relationship between ‘away’ and negating functions, the exact nature of the recurrent gestural forms, and the particular negating function that those gestures perform, varies across languages. In terms of form, the gesture is most similar to Bresse and Müller’s (2014b: 1598) ‘brushing away’ gesture category, which involves a “rapid twist of the wrist”. There are some differences between the performances of the Syuba speakers and Bresse and Müller’s description. While the twisting of the wrist is similar, through the pronation of the forearm, the Syuba speakers do not always produce the gesture rapidly. In regard to the handshape that the Syuba speakers often begin the gesture with bunched hands, rather than a ‘lax, flat hand’. Functionally, Bresse and Müller argue that ‘brushing away’ is used pragmatically for negative assessment, while in Syuba it appears that the gesture is as much about marking the grammatically negated phrase as it is about

speaker's negative assessment of the lack of referred items. It is therefore possible that the use of this type of 'away' gesture in these Syuba narratives represents a sub-family of 'away as negative' gestures that has not yet been attested, or at least a variation on the existing 'brushing away' type.

Bressem and Müller draw a link between all of the 'away' negating gesture across the languages in their study, observing that the underlying commonality "is semantically motivated by the effect of actions of removing or keeping away of things. The effect that all actions have in common is that the body space is cleared of annoying or otherwise unwanted objects" (Bressem and Müller 2014b: 1596). In the examples from the Syuba corpus, the lack of a desired resource could be construed as annoying for the individuals who have to suffer without them, even though the referred items are very much wanted. The use of a the 'away' gesture type in Syuba with a negating function may represent a shift of the gesture from the prototypical motivation for the action scheme, from clearing the space of something unwanted, to clearing the space to show the absence of something (even if it is wanted). This development of meaning is not dissimilar to Calbris's (2003) analysis of cutting gestures, where there is a representative schema in which cutting actions can refer to any kind of interruption more broadly.

The existing action scheme provides a useful starting point for understanding commonalities in the semantic motivation for gestures with an away trajectory that demonstrate a negating function, however with more cross-linguistic research we will hopefully arrive at a more nuanced picture of variation in form and function of these gestures, as well as their commonalities.

5 Conclusion

In this paper I looked at the use of an 'away' gesture, which usually involves pronation of the forearm, and partial extension of the fingers, forming a trajectory away from the speaker. This recurrent movement co-occurs with grammatical structures of negation, specifically negation that indicates the absence of something. The use of this gesture by Syuba speakers indicates or emphasises the absence of the object from the conversational space.

This work has broadened the number of language families in which 'away as negative' correlation between gestural form and pragmatic function has been observed. Although not a radical departure from the existing literature, the use of a gesture similarly to the 'brushing away' handshape to mark the absence of desired items further extends our understanding of the breadth of what this gesture type can mark and expanding Bressem and Müller's (2014b) typology of the 'away' as negation gesture family.

Analysis of Syuba has also demonstrated cross-linguistic similarity in the correlation between gestural stroke and the node of negation. These examples show a similar tendency to those in Harrison's (2010) study of English, where the stroke of the gesture co-occurs with the negating node. In the Syuba data this was commonly a negative indeterminate pronoun, or negative copula. The Syuba data also indicates that cross-linguistic variation in word order will affect what the co-occurring gesture will be able to scope over. Harrison notes for English that the gesture is held to include content in the scope of the negating node, while in Syuba that content precedes the grammatically negative element and is not included in the gesture hold.

Although there is a growing body of work that explores properties of gesture cross-linguistically, this work is still heavily grounded in an Anglo-European linguistic context. Increasing the number of language families for which we have gestural analysis can ensure a broader typology of gestures that have a pragmatic function, particular those that have a basis in an action scheme such as the relationship between away trajectory and negation.

Abbreviations

1 first person
 COP copula verb
 EMPH emphatic
 FOC focus
 GEN genitive
 LOC locative
 NEG negation
 NON.PST non-past
 PST past
 SG singular

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