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Polite appearances:
How non-manual features convey
politeness in British Sign Language

Abstract: This paper explores how non-manual features are key to conveying linguistic politeness in British Sign Language (BSL). Data were collected through five semi-structured interviews incorporating the elicitation of two speech acts commonly associated with research on linguistic politeness: requests and apologies. The data from this exploratory study suggest that non-manual features (including specific mouth gestures and movements of the head and upper body) are more crucial for linguistic politeness than manual signs. The data indicate a degree of commonality between the features used for politeness in BSL and those previously identified in American Sign Language (Roush 1999; Hoza 2001, 2007). While non-manual features convey both linguistic and paralinguistic meaning in signed language (Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006), their use in politeness highlights the complexity of the interaction between these two functions and illuminates an aspect of politeness frequently overlooked in much research: the use of intonation. Analysis of the use of non-manual features for politeness also problematizes the categorization of politeness strategies using existing frameworks developed on spoken languages, such as the internal modifications outlined by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989).

Keywords: Signed language, British Sign Language, intonation, prosody, politeness marker, non-manual features

1 Introduction

The extensive literature on linguistic politeness in spoken languages (Leech 1983; Brown and Levinson 1987; Blum-Kulka et al. 1989; Eelen 2001; Spencer-Oatey 2008; Watts 2003) is not mirrored within sign linguistics. The study re-

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ported here is the first to explore linguistic politeness in British Sign Language (BSL) and highlights the importance of non-manual features for politeness identified in other signed languages. Non-manual features include the use of facial expression and the movement of the upper-body. The use of these features for politeness has been examined in research on American Sign Language (Roush 1999; Hoza 2001, 2007), Libras or Brazilian Sign Language (Ferreira Brito 1995) and Nihon Shuwa or Japanese Sign Language (George 2011). Hoza (2001, 2007) suggests that it is not the signs which are utilized but how they are performed that is key for politeness. This generates two foci for discussion that are relevant to politeness research more generally.

Firstly, the use of non-manual features to convey politeness in BSL is relevant to discussion of prosody in politeness. In spoken language, intonation relates to use of pitch and forms one element of prosody, along with volume, pace and vocal quality (Culpeper et al. 2003). Though some of this terminology may seem out of place when describing signed language, volume can be equated to size of signing and vocal quality compared with movement quality. The equivalent to intonation in signed language is the use of non-manual features (Kyle and Woll 1985), though use of these features is complex as they also convey other functions (Sutton-Spence and Woll 1999; Johnston and Schembri 2007). Studies on prosody in signed language (Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006; Dachovsky and Sandler 2009; de Vos et al. 2009) indicate that facial expression can convey both systematic linguistic meaning and affect in a similar way that intonation in spoken language conveys both linguistic and paralinguistic information (de Vos et al. 2009). However, none of these studies has touched on the subject of politeness. Similarly, Culpeper et al. (2003) acknowledge the tendency for spoken language research on (im)politeness to focus on lexical and grammatical strategies, rather than encompassing the examination of prosody to provide a wider understanding of the subject; though notable exceptions to this are Wichmann (2004), Culpeper (2005, 2012) and Félix-Brasdefer (2009).

Secondly, if non-manual features are so crucial for conveying politeness (Hoza 2001, 2007) this may create challenges for describing language use on the basis of the internal modification categorization[1] outlined by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989). Data from the present study indicate that many of these types of internal modification may be conveyed through prosodic use of non-manual features in BSL and that individual non-manual features may be used across a range of modification types.

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1 In brief, these are divided into syntactic downgraders, other downgraders (consultative devices, understaters, hedges and downtoners) and upgraders.

The apparent prominence of intonation for linguistic politeness in signed language may originate from differences in research methodology in signed and spoken languages. Lack of focus on intonation in previous politeness research may partially result from the methods used for data collection and recording, including the written discourse completion tasks (DCT) developed by Blum-Kulka (1982) and used extensively in later studies (for example Blum-Kulka et al. 1989; Beebe et al. 1990; Billmyer and Varghese 2000; Ogiermann 2009; Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis 2010). In contrast, data collection for research on signed language necessitates the use of video recording in order to capture language use and, as a consequence, intonation forms an integral part of the data. Use of intonation for politeness is therefore more readily apparent in research on linguistic politeness in signed language.

This paper explores how linguistic politeness in BSL may be performed through use of non-manual features rather than manual lexical components. First I examine the literature relating to sign language research on both non-manual features and linguistic politeness before relating these areas to the literature on intonation for (im)politeness more generally. The importance of non-manual features for politeness is then illustrated through discussion of the data generated in the present study, involving participants' use of polite language and their opinions about polite BSL. This focus on politeness conveyed through intonation foregrounds issues relating to methodology and categorization of politeness that may have relevance for future research into both signed and spoken language.

2 Background

2.1 Non-manual features

In signed languages non-manual features are used for a variety of functions. They are used in interrogatives, to indicate topicalization, in imperatives, in conditional and relative clauses, to convey affirmation or negation, and to convey contrastive and comparative discourse (Liddell 1978, 1980; Wilbur and Patschke 1998; Wilbur 1999; Sutton-Spence and Woll 1999; van der Kooij et al. 2006). An example of non-manual use is the way in which raised eyebrows, possibly accompanied by a tilt of the head, are an important element of interrogatives (Sutton-Spence and Woll 1999; Johnston and Schembri 2007). In fact non-manual features play such an important role in polar question forms, ones that require a yes/no answer, that in many signed languages questions can be conveyed without the need for a lexical question particle (Zeshan 2004).

In all these cases non-manual features are acting as the equivalent to prosodic stress in spoken language (Nespor and Sandler 1999). Given the different modalities used in signed and spoken languages, the performance of intonation necessitates the use of different articulators. In speech, intonation uses just one articulator, the vocal chords, to make speech sounds of different pitch. In contrast, intonation in signed language may be conveyed through the speed and size of manual signs but also involves multiple non-manual articulators (eyebrows, eyelids, cheeks and lips) which may be used in combination with one another (Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006).

Sandler and Lillo-Martin (2006) conducted a detailed investigation of the use of facial non-manual features for intonation and argue that their grammatical function is a prosodic one, motivated more by pragmatic intent than by the manual signs they accompany. They contrast this linguistic usage with the idiosyncratic nature of paralinguistic intonation motivated by emotion, identifying temporal differences in the use of raised brows for these two functions (Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006). However, these differences may be less easily distinguished when considering the use of these features for linguistic politeness. Studies of non-manual features have approached the subject in a variety of ways. Dachovsky and Sandler (2009) describe the pragmatic motivation behind the use of raised brows and squints in Israeli Sign Language suggesting that these features are componential. De Vos et al. (2009) identified an interaction between linguistic and paralinguistic usage, where neither form is dominant but where use is influenced by the *phonetic strength* of the expression, in other words how easy a particular expression is to perform or maintain. Some studies have employed the Facial Action Coding System (FACS) developed by Ekman and Friesen (1978) as a means of teasing apart linguistic and paralinguistic usage. But while this facilitates an anatomically detailed analysis of facial expression, it fails to encompass non-manual features that make use of the head and upper body, though these have also been acknowledged to have prosodic functions. For example, Wilbur and Patschke (1998) examined forward and backward leans of the body in American Sign Language, detailing prosodic, lexical and semantic functions, all relating to the notion of *contrast*. This complexity and multi-functionality is also a feature of Fenlon's (2010) exploration of prosodic markers in narrative BSL. Limitations on knowledge of simultaneity generally within signed languages (Vermeerbergen et al. 2007) are further challenged when considering simultaneous use of multiple non-manual features, with various authors recognizing the lack of clarity on this issue (Liddell 1980; Baker-Shenk 1982; Brennan 1992; Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006; Johnston and Schembri 2007; De Vos et al. 2009).

Though none of the aforementioned studies on prosody in sign language has touched on the subject of politeness, the notion that non-manual features are motivated by pragmatic intent is supported by the studies of politeness in American Sign Language by Roush (1999) and Hoza (2001, 2007). This is reinforced by a cross-linguistic comparison of 35 signed languages (Zeshan 2004) which identified a high degree of commonality in the use of non-manual expression for polar questions. Zeshan compares this to similarly widespread use of rising intonation in speech, a feature noted in relation to politeness by Brown and Levinson (1987).

2.2 Politeness in signed language

The breadth of literature on linguistic politeness in spoken languages is not reflected in the more specialized field of sign linguistics. This article reports on the first study to be conducted on politeness in BSL, and there has been relatively little research conducted elsewhere (see Ferreira Brito 1995; Roush 1999, 2011; Hoza 2001, 2007; George 2011).

Studies in both American Sign Language (ASL) (Roush 1999; Hoza 2001, 2007) and Japanese Sign Language (JSL) (George 2011) have highlighted the importance of non-manual features for politeness in these languages. These studies have followed the Brown and Levinson (1987) model of politeness and the underlying concept of *face* (Goffman 1967). Hoza (2001, 2007) details how non-manual features are used to convey both positive and negative politeness strategies,[2] and how these relate to the variables of power and differing degrees of imposition, also drawing on involvement and independence discourse styles (Scollon and Scollon 2001). Between them Roush (1999) and Hoza (2001, 2007) identified five non-manual features used for politeness in ASL which serve to mitigate comments and can be performed either alone or in conjunction with manual signs. These features are summarized in Table 1. Hoza (2001, 2007) argues that the distribution of these five features relates specifically to degree of imposition.

The *tight lips* mouth gesture has been identified as the default polite expression in ASL (Hoza 2001, 2007; Mindess 2006) and is a feature also mentioned in the work on politeness in JSL (George 2011). Other similarities between JSL and ASL include the *polite grimace* and *polite grimace frown* which occur with more severe threats to face resulting from status differential and/or degree of

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2 These positive and negative politeness strategies correspond to those devised by Brown and Levinson (1987).

Table 1: Non-manual features for politeness in American Sign Language.

Feature	Description	Usage
polite pucker	pursed lips	an involvement strategy used for minor face-threats where cooperation is expected
tight lips	lips tightened together, with tension	the default expression for moderate face-threats, used for involvement and independence strategies
polite grimace	a tight smile, with lips either open or lightly closed	used for involvement and independence in more difficult imposition contexts
polite grimace frown	as above but with the addition of a frown	used for involvement and independence strategies involving severe face-threat and a high degree of imposition
body/head teeter	a movement of the head and/or upper body from side to side	used alone or in conjunction with other features for extreme face-threats and high imposition contexts

imposition, suggesting potential cross-linguistic similarities for politeness in signed languages.

However, this concentration on mouth movements risks oversimplifying descriptions of how politeness is articulated. Hoza describes only one feature that incorporates the head and upper body, the *body/head teeter*, and briefly mentions, but does not pursue, the use of a nose-wrinkle in a rejection (Hoza 2001: 144–5). There is no discussion about the use of other facial features such as the eyes and eyebrows and consequently minimal consideration of simultaneity of use, a problematic feature in the debate on sign language prosody. However some of these issues are discussed in relation to other languages. Ferreira Brito (1995) mentions that frowns and squints are used to soften higher imposition requests in Libras. George (2011) identifies two key features relating to use of the head and upper body in JSL; *chin up* and *chin forward* both invoke movement from the head and upper body. George (2011) concludes that the lower the position of the chin the greater the degree of politeness involved. A similar relationship between a lowering of the head and degree of imposition has been noted in Libras (Ferreira Brito 1995). George (2011) also identified the *head hold,* used to soften polar requests and noted that when multiple features were used simultaneously the expressions were judged to be more polite, particularly when performed at the beginning or end of a phrase.

Further features identified for politeness in JSL relate to the pace of signing and a differentiated use of signing space, with smaller and slower signing deemed more polite (George 2011). These findings concur with research on ASL

(Cokely and Baker-Shenk 1980; Liddell and Johnson 1989) and Ferreira Brito's (1995) description of Libras, where higher impositions requests are performed with a more delicate movement. The importance of non-manual features for politeness in these sign languages is evident in the existing literature. Given that these languages, and the communities that use them, are unrelated (Zeshan 2004), one might anticipate non-manual features to have a politeness function in BSL and other signed languages.

2.3 Polite intonation

Despite the importance of prosody within spoken communication it has rarely been explored in the literature on (im)politeness (though see Thompson 1995; Trees and Manusov 1998; Wichmann 2004; Culpeper 2005, 2012; Félix-Brasdefer 2009). Some studies that have incorporated prosody have done so relatively superficially (Trees and Manusov 1998) or as a secondary focus, as in the analysis of requests in different varieties of Central American Spanish (Félix-Brasdefer 2009) and Kasper's (2006) study of oral proficiency interviews. The reticence to explore prosody for politeness may stem from the practical difficulties involved in this type of research. Arndt and Janney (1987) suggest a certain level of inconvenience in examining speech in its entirety rather than the verbal linguistic element alone. But the importance of viewing communication in a more holistic way is highlighted in a number of studies, including the complex experimental comparison of linguistic and non-linguistic politeness strategies in American English and Korean (Ambady et al. 1996).

   Culpeper et al. (2003) discuss the selection of particular pitch contours to convey emotion and attitude through intonation. This association between politeness and pitch occurs in several studies. The correlation of pitch and politeness in Japanese and English was investigated by Loveday (1981), with a high pitch denoting politeness by women in Japanese and for both men and women in English. Brown and Levinson (1987) likewise suggest that polite utterances are associated with use of a higher or rising pitch. Politeness indicated through pitch was also a feature in the discussion around the perception of polite prosody in people affected by Parkinson's disease (Monetta et al. 2008). Loveday (1981) advocates that intonation could be considered alongside other prosodic features, as in Félix-Brasdefer's (2009) identification of prosodic downgraders perceived in polite requests in different varieties of Spanish. These prosodic downgraders involve a combination of pitch, timing, volume and rhythm. Combining a final rising tone with the use of increased volume at the end of a request conveyed positive politeness, or solidarity (Félix-Brasdefer

2009). Wichmann's (2004) examination of intonation in *please-requests* in British English found prosodic distinctions between requests that were speaker or hearer oriented, with rising final intonation signally an orientation towards the hearer. However, the work of Ofuka et al. (2000) suggests that though final intonation influenced perception of politeness in Japanese these judgements are highly subjective, with listeners more likely to consider people with a similar speech rate as their own as being more polite.

Raised brows in signed language have been equated with higher pitch in speech (Zeshan 2004; Dachovsky and Sandler 2009), and there is resonance between the literature on pitch and the use of this non-manual feature. For example Dachovsky (2008) identified raised eyebrows as an indication of *prediction* in Israeli Sign Language while a relationship between falling pitch and a predicted response has been identified in spoken English (Thompson 1995; Wichmann 2004). However, Thompson (1995) suggests that though falling pitch contours are used in *conducive* questions in English, ones where the answer can be anticipated, a rising tone may be used instead, for politeness purposes. Cross-modal commonalities are also indicated by Trees and Manusov's (1998) identification of raised eyebrows in speech as an indication of concern for face-needs.

Further cross-modal similarity is found in the use of the upper body, with Trees and Manusov (1998: 578) suggesting that a direct body orientation and smaller gestures represent a concern for face, while indirect body orientation and more expansive gestures signal the opposite. In signed language Wilbur and Patschke (1998) identified a forward body lean as indicating inclusiveness with the interlocutor, and various authors suggest that use of smaller signing space conveys politeness (Cokely and Baker-Shenk 1980; Liddell and Johnson 1989; George 2011). Trees and Manusov (1998) suggest that, in speech, verbal and nonverbal elements interact with each other in a complex way, with nonverbal elements shifting in their degree of influence over meaning. Their work may well reflect the complex interaction of multiple non-manual features in signed language (Dachovsky and Sandler 2009; de Vos et al. 2009) and highlights a commonality between simultaneity in spoken and signed languages that is overlooked when research excludes paralinguistic communication (Vermeerbergen et al. 2007).

2.4 Summary

Non-manual features are a complex aspect of all signed languages. These features perform a range of grammatical and prosodic functions. An important role

of these features can be considered their equivalence to intonation in speech, although the multiple articulators mean that multiple features can be performed simultaneously, further complicating their patterns of usage. Though research suggests that intonation is the key means of conveying linguistic politeness in signed language, it has predominantly focussed on the use of mouth gestures. The present study details use of a broader range of non-manual features, including use of the head and upper body. Some of these features, such as raised brows, have also been identified in studies of visual-prosody and politeness in spoken language (Trees and Manusov 1998), and suggest potential cross-modal commonality.

3 Method

3.1 Participants

Participants in the present study were five Deaf professionals, three female and two male, all of whom have extensive experience of interacting with both Deaf and non-Deaf people, both directly and via interpreter-mediation. All participants are educated to postgraduate level, and in this respect are atypical of the Deaf population. In this study these attributes are seen as beneficial, with the intention to generate discussion on modification of language use in different contexts. It was anticipated that these participants would be more articulate on the subject and also more comfortable with involvement in research.

   All the participants were well known to me. The rationale for this was not only to encourage richer data generation, but also in response to potential sensitivities relating to this activity (Harris et al. 2009). Deaf people have historically been subordinate to non-Deaf people in research environments (Young and Ackerman 2001; Sutton-Spence and West 2011) and, as a non-Deaf researcher, I could be perceived as perpetuating this situation. Working with participants who were familiar with me was one way of reducing any potential anxiety about the motivations behind the research and how the data generated would be used.

   Selection of participants was further informed by the fact that three of them come from Deaf family backgrounds and were exposed to sign language from birth. This follows a recommendation for the inclusion of *native* signers in all research on signed language (Johnston and Schembri 2007). The other two participants represent the majority of Deaf people, estimated at between 90–97 %, raised in non-Deaf families (Mitchell and Karchmer 2004; Johnston and Schem-

bri 2007). Their inclusion within the study is also crucial to better understand how BSL is used and to reflect the diversity of language use within the Deaf population. For these participants exposure to sign language first occurred through peer interaction at primary school.

3.2 Data collection

Data were collected through an informal semi-structured interview with each participant, lasting around 40 minutes. The interviews were conducted in BSL and were video recorded. The interviews comprised open questions regarding politeness in BSL, similarities and differences between the markers identified for politeness in ASL (Roush 1999; Hoza 2001, 2007) and, incorporated the elicitation of two speech acts commonly associated with research on politeness, requests and apologies (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989). The elicitations, summarized in Table 2, involved a range of speech acts directed to me (a non-Deaf fluent user of BSL of similar status) or to an imagined Deaf superior at work. The request for a lift to the airport was devised as a high imposition, but non-work related, remark to a status equal, while the requests to borrow a pen and for annual leave were designed to mirror those used by Hoza (2001) and George (2011) with ranking of imposition judged as low and high respectively. Neither of these studies incorporated the speech act of apologizing, so I adapted the damaged car apology from Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984). I devised apologies for the late report as another involving a high degree of imposition and the loss of pen for one with a low imposition ranking.

The speech acts directed to me were elicited at the beginning of the interview and formed a useful introduction to the discussion of politeness more

Table 2: Elicited speech acts showing situational differences in imposition, power and distance.

Comment	Ranking of imposition	Power	Distance
Ask to borrow my pen	–	–	–
Apologize for losing my pen	–	–	–
Ask me for a lift to airport early on Saturday	+	–	–
Ask Deaf superior to borrow their pen	–	+	–
Ask Deaf superior for next week off work	+	+	–
Apologize to Deaf superior for submitting a report late	+	+	–
Apologize to Deaf superior for damaging their car	+	+	–

generally. The elicited comments directed to a Deaf superior were performed towards the end and were followed by an exploration of how use of politeness in BSL might be altered depending on the status, identity and social distance of the interlocutor.

3.3 Data coding and analysis

To facilitate the analysis, discussion, and reporting of the data it was necessary to have some form of written representation of it. The process of transcription and analysis of the data was complex, due to the range of the data captured within the interviews and the different facets of the language being examined.

The elicited speech acts were transcribed using a BSL gloss, with capitalization used to represent manual signs, following the general convention in sign linguistics (Sutton-Spence and Woll 1999: xi). The gloss gives a general indication of sign order and rough sign/word equivalency; hyphenated words indicate a phrase conveyed by a single sign. A sign language gloss often encompasses a basic description of the non-manual features used; the scope of these is indicated above the glossed text. A modified version of five non-manual features for politeness in ASL, described by Hoza (2001, 2007) was used as the basis for identification of non-manual features in the elicited comments although not all these features occurred in the data. The polite grimace frown was omitted: polite grimace and frown were coded separately as frown also occurred in combination with other features. Adopting a data-driven approach meant that additional expressions and body postures not discussed by Hoza (2001, 2007) were also recorded. The range of non-manual features identified in the data is shown in Table 3.

The host of tensions associated with the reporting of sign language data in a written form are well summarized by Stone and West (2012). Therefore I have adopted a reflexive approach incorporating sensitivity and transparency of process. I translated the dialogue from the interviews into English, with the inclusion of additional commentary to elaborate on the visual nature of the lan-

Table 3: Coding of non-manual features.

Eyes	Nose	Mouth	Head	Body
Brows raised	Wrinkled	Tight lips	Side tilt	Side tilt
Frown		Polite grimace	Nod	Backward tilt
Squint				Forward tilt
				Polite duck

guage. Issues of timing cannot be accurately reflected when working in a translated document, but where relevant I either incorporated issues within the translation or added relevant detail into my narrative. Word emphasis has been indicated through italics rather than the standard convention of capitalization (Jefferson 1984) to avoid confusion with BSL gloss. All use of capitalized words in the transcripts indicates reference to BSL signs. Analysis of the dialogue was approached from a thematic perspective with some themes corresponding directly to the phenomena observed in the elicitations.

4 Results

The data discussed here are taken from both the elicited comments and the interview dialogues. Though participants used lexical politeness markers such as PLEASE and SORRY discussion of these markers is beyond the scope of this article. Their use may be considered optional and is frequently influenced by language contact with English (see Mapson 2012). What the data suggest is that non-manual features are the key means of conveying politeness in BSL. The importance of non-manual features for politeness was mentioned explicitly by all participants and exemplified by them in the elicited comments. These non-manual features are not confined to facial expression but additionally incorporate use of the head and upper body. Examination of the elicited data allowed me to identify six key non-manual features used across the range of comments.

In all the elicited requests the feature used most consistently by all participants was raised eyebrows. Both the tight lips and polite grimace mouth gestures were used by all participants; the latter was used most frequently where degree of imposition was higher. Similarly the *polite duck* was more prevalent in higher imposition requests; four participants used this feature when asking for annual leave and three when requesting a lift to the airport. *Side tilts* were a feature used more frequently in requests to a superior and in particular the higher imposition request for annual leave. Participants' use of these features in the elicited requests is summarized in Table 4.

Non-manual features were also an important element of the apologies; their use is summarized in Table 5. Participants described how apologies in BSL are reflected through use of facial expression, unlike English where reliance on lexicon was considered more important. In the elicited apologies there was less frequent use of the body, with a decrease in the number of participants using the polite duck and side tilts. Again the predominant feature was raised eyebrows, though squints were also used across all three apologies. The polite

Table 4: Number of participants who used key non-manual features in each request.

Speech act	Tight lips	Polite grimace	Raised brows	Squint	Side tilt	Polite duck
Ask to borrow my pen	2	–	5	–	1	1
Ask me for a lift to airport early on Saturday	3	4	5	–	1	3
Ask Deaf superior to borrow their pen	2	1	5	–	2	–
Ask Deaf superior for next week off work	3	3	5	3	3	4
Total number of participants who used each feature	5	5	5	3	5	4

Table 5: Number of participants who used key non-manual features in each apology.

Speech act	Tight lips	Polite grimace	Raised brows	Squint	Side tilt	Polite duck
Apologize for losing my pen	1	4	4	2	1	2
Apologize to Deaf superior for submitting a report late	3	2	5	2	2	1
Apologize to Deaf superior for damaging their car	3	5	4	2	1	2
Total number of participants who used each feature	4	5	5	3	2	3

grimace mouth gesture was used most frequently in the more personal apologies for car damage and the lost pen. Only two used this feature when apologizing for the late report submission. The tight lips mouth gesture was used in each of the apology types, most frequently in the late report and damaged car scenarios.

Distribution of individual participants' usage does not indicate systematic patterning influenced by either gender or native/near-native user status. However, such patterns would be unlikely to emerge from such a small sample.

The discussion that follows provides more detail around the most prominent features used for politeness within the data. For convenience I have artificially divided the discussion of the data that follows into two sections: use of the face and use of the head and body. However, it is important to bear in mind that many of these features are performed in conjunction with one another, and the role these features play may well result from complex interactions between them, rather than use of individual elements.

5 Discussion

5.1 The face

Facial expression in signed language is able to convey both systematic linguistic and paralinguistic meaning (de Vos et al. 2009) paralleling intonation in spoken language. Interestingly, while the literature on prosody in signed language has tended to focus on the use of the upper-face and body (Wilbur and Patschke 1998; Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006; Dachovsky and Sandler 2009; de Vos et al. 2009), research on politeness in signed languages (Roush 1999; Hoza 2001, 2007; George 2011) has concentrated more on the use of the mouth. Data from the present study highlights use of both the lower and upper parts of the face, and I will discuss each in turn.

5.1.1 Use of the mouth

The data from this study form a useful comparison with the work on ASL (Roush 1999; Hoza 2001, 2007) which focuses on the use of three specific mouth gestures used to mitigate requests and rejections. Two of these features, illustrated in Figure 1, were observed in the data from my study, indicating a degree of commonality between the features used for politeness in ASL and BSL.

Tight lips   Polite grimace

Figure 1: Polite mouth gestures in BSL.

The use of tight lips occurred in all requests, and was the predominant mouth gesture associated with the low imposition requests. It was also used the elicited apologies, mainly where imposition was higher. This feature was described or used by four of the participants during the interviews and its

prevalent usage suggests that it functions as the default mouth gesture for politeness in BSL, in much the same way that Hoza (2001, 2007) describes its use in ASL.

The polite grimace was found mainly in the higher imposition requests and was prevalent in the personally oriented apologies relating to the lost pen and damaged car. However only two participants used this feature in the late report apology, suggesting that either this feature is influenced more by the personal nature of an apology rather than degree of imposition, or that degree of imposition may be valued differently by BSL users. In apologies the polite grimace was occasionally used in conjunction with a frown, as in the polite grimace frown identified in ASL, but occurred more often with raised eyebrows. Four participants explicitly identified the polite grimace during conversation, with three of these using the polite grimace frown spontaneously during conversation.

The *polite pucker*, used in ASL to mitigate less imposing requests and those where cooperation is anticipated (Hoza 2001, 2007), was absent from the elicited data in my study, where it might have been anticipated in the low imposition pen requests. Participants additionally expressed uncertainty over its use in BSL. This suggests that not all use of non-manual features is shared across signed languages, indicating that these features are playing a specific linguistic role rather than pertaining to a universal gestural repertoire.

Use of mouth gestures in BSL is subject to the influence of language-contact (Sutton-Spence 1999), resulting in English word mouthings replacing or displacing BSL mouth gestures. This patterning was found in relation to the use of the polite mouth gestures previously discussed (Mapson 2012). Displacement of use was frequently seen with one participant who used a more Anglicized syntax and word mouthings throughout, as seen in example (1) where the polite grimace is performed after the signed phrase is complete.

(1)   (Participant 1)

	raised brows polite grimace

CAN BORROW PEN PLEASE, NEED LEFT HOME PLEASE
'Can I borrow your pen please? I need it because I left mine at home.'

5.1.2 Use of the upper-face

Though research on politeness in ASL has focused particularly on the use of mouth gestures, participants in the present study highlighted the importance of the upper part of the face, both implicitly in their language use and explicitly in the interview dialogues.

(2)   (Participant 2)

So yes, I think you're right that the mouth is important, but it is linked to what is happening with the eyes. The mouth alone isn't enough.

Unsurprisingly the use of raised eyebrows was ubiquitous in the elicited requests; raised eyebrows are commonly used as a question marker in BSL and many other signed languages (Sutton-Spence and Woll 1999; Zeshan 2004; Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006). However, here, their use exemplifies the multifunctionality of non-manual features, with their prevalence throughout the elicited data, reinforced by participant comments, suggesting that in requests raised brows perform not as a question marker, but as a polite question marker. They also feature in apologies and frequently accompany the tight lips and polite grimace mouth gestures, enhancing mitigation of the comment. Example (3) demonstrates use of the upper face in an annual leave request, and shows the prevalence of raised brows. The span of feature use is indicated by the underline.

(3)   (Participant 2)

<div style="margin-left:2em;">

           <u>   squint   </u>   <u>   raised brows   </u>
I-KNOW SHORT-NOTICE   CAN OFF NEXT-WEEK ME WHY

           <u>   squint & raised brows   </u>   <u>   raised brows   </u>
WORK-HARD REALLY NEED HOLIDAY   FLY-OFF I-LOOK CHEAP COST

     <u>   frown & squint   </u>   <u>   squint & raised brows   </u>
GOOD OPPORTUNITY   I-KNOW SHORT-NOTICE

                            <u>   raised brows   </u>
BUT CAN ME OFF YOU-GIVE-ME NEXT-WEEK

</div>

'I know it's short notice but would it be possible to have next week off work? I've been working really hard and I could do with a break. I've had a look for cheap flights and there's one on offer. I appreciate it's short notice but could you possibly allow me next week off?'

This example shows how raised brows can be used simultaneously with the other key feature of the upper-face, the squint. The latter feature was explicitly described by one participant as a form of mitigation, a comment that resonates with Ferreira Brito's (1995) observations of the squint to soften higher imposition requests in Libras.

(4)   (Participant 4)

I think the polite grimace goes with a narrowing of the eyes and forward hunch (demonstrated with a body tilt to the side) I think semi closed

eyes go with this if you are asking for something, it is like the equivalent of saying "sorry to bother you" or "sorry."

Dachovsky and Sandler (2009) describe the pragmatic motivation behind use of raised brows and eye squints in Israeli Sign Language and suggest these features are componential, with raised brows signalling that the current phrase will be followed by another or demands a response, while the squint indicates the need to infer or retrieve information. Though there is no suggestion that meanings will be shared cross-linguistically, Dachovsky and Sandler's (2006) proposal is perhaps supported in the present data where this combination of features is used to mitigate remarks such as *I know it's short notice but*, perhaps signposting the question that follows. Raised eyebrows may also convey prediction (Dachovsky 2008), which would rather suggest that their use in polar questions indicates that the signer knows what the response is likely to be, while Zeshan (2004) considers their use to equate to the use of rising intonation in speech. Thompson (1995) suggests that though a rising tone in English is generally used in questions where the response cannot be predicted, it may also be used for conducive questions, one where the answer is anticipated, where it functions as a hedge. My data suggest that raised eyebrows convey a similar intonational function in BSL.

The use of raised eyebrows for politeness is reinforced by their prevalent use throughout the elicited apologies, where their function has no overlap with question markers. When a lexical sign SORRY was used, this was generally accompanied by raised eyebrows, and less frequently with a frown. This suggests that raised eyebrows convey a politeness function and hints at the complex relationship between the features used within the language and their multiple functions. De Vos et al. (2009) suggest that paralinguistic and linguistic features overlap and that use of non-manual features relates to phonetic strength, or ease of articulation, rather than the dominance of a particular expression. Raised eyebrows are physically easy to maintain throughout extended phrases without compromising the use of mouth gestures or word mouthings, and this convenience may motivate their extensive use within the data from the present study.

5.2 The body

The data indicate that non-manual features for politeness in BSL are not restricted to facial expression. Figure 2 shows the two key features identified from both the elicited and conversational data: the side tilt and polite duck.

Side tilt   Polite duck

Figure 2: Use of head and body for politeness.

5.2.1 Side tilt

The side tilt can be performed by tilting the head alone, or head and upper body combined. These variations can be considered as one feature to allow for idiosyncratic variation (Wilbur and Patschke 1998) and because the intent appears to be the same in all cases. In the elicited data side tilts were more frequently used in the higher imposition requests, and for the annual leave request in particular, suggesting the feature may be more likely to accompany higher imposition requests to higher status interlocutors. The side tilt was frequently accompanied by raised eyebrows and tight lips. All participants spontaneously described or used some form of side tilt during the interviews, relating its use to a desire for a positive response, suggesting a function for mitigation to soften the request or, to add an element of persuasiveness.

(5)   (Participant 5)
        I remember one person, who would always tilt his head over to the left and when you saw that you'd automatically know he was after something, and it made it very difficult to say no!

Side tilts were also used within apologies, often in conjunction with a polar question acting as an appealer, such as *is that OK?* Head tilts have been identified in conjunction with polar questions in Sign Language of the Netherlands (de Vos et al. 2009) and related to the production of rhythmic or intonational phrases in Israeli sign language (Nespor and Sandler 1999) and Swiss German

Sign Language (Boyes Braem 1999). Though this latter work explored body sways from side to side in relation to rhythmic prosody during a narrative, the feature described is similar to the body/head teeter documented by Hoza (2001, 2007) used to mitigate serious face-threats in ASL. The side tilt of the head/ upper body in BSL lacks the repeated movement of the body/head teeter in ASL. The data from the elicited comments in the present study did not reveal any use of the body/head teeter, though this may have been due to the different speech acts examined in the two studies, or because participants did not judge any of the elicited comments to involve such extreme threats to face. However, participants expressed uncertainty about use of this feature when directly questioned on the subject during interviews. This suggests cross-linguistic differences and the potential for contrasting functions and meaning to be associated with similar features.

5.2.2 Polite duck

The polite duck, a movement involving lowering the head and slightly raising or hunching the shoulders, was used more in requests than in apologies. It appeared most frequently in higher imposition requests though sentence positioning was far from consistent. One participant used it to initiate requests; one used it at the start of the final phrase and others in phrase final position. Its use for polite requests was explicated by one of the participants in extract (6).

(6)   (Participant 2)
        Yes like when you hunch forward when you are asking a question. Particularly if it is a difficult one, you would hunch forward and lean (leans to the left) you use this upper body movement as you ask.

The polite duck may be very similar to the chin forward feature identified in JSL (George 2011) and the lowering of the head in Libras (Ferreira Brito 1995). Though not discussed in relation to politeness in ASL by Hoza (Hoza 2001, 2007), a similar feature may occur in that language. Wilbur and Patschke (1998) discuss prosodic use of the *shrug*, a variant of the backward lean, which they propose contrasts exclusive, rather than inclusive (forward lean) categories during discourse. They detail its use in conjunction with signs meaning *just, any* and *only*, suggesting that both ASL and BSL may use a similar feature as a hedge or a downtoner. However, accurately reflecting sign language use in written English is problematic, resulting in a certain lack of clarity when drawing comparison with other studies. Potential similarities between the polite

duck in BSL, the chin forward in JSL and the shrug in ASL are therefore difficult to ascertain.

In the elicited data the polite duck was performed in conjunction with either tight lips or polite grimace mouth gestures. George (2011) identified use of multiple features in Japanese Sign Language indicating a greater degree of politeness, and the data from my study suggest similar use in BSL where greater arrays of features are used in higher imposition comments. The polite duck was also combined with the side tilt, generally in phrase final position. This particular combination is reflective of the suggestion by Wilbur and Patschke (1998: 280) that if a lean is being used during a phrase, for example as a question marker, then intonational stress will be marked by an additional lean or a head tilt down.

5.3 Non-manual features as internal modification

Non-manual features can be performed in a subtle and fleeting way, making them a challenge to transcribe. They also perform a broad range of functions, making definition of their roles in politeness difficult particularly when trying to relate them to categorization schemes developed on spoken language. Hoza (2001, 2007) describes non-manual modifiers relating to politeness in ASL as being quite distinct from grammatical markers, possibly resulting from his particular focus on the use of mouth gestures. The data from the present study suggest that a much wider range of features are used to convey politeness. Each feature has a number of functions some of which may be associated with forms of internal modification in requests (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989). However, use of categorization schemes based on spoken languages such as lexical/ phrasal and syntactic downgraders (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989) used in many studies of polite requests (see Woodfield and Economidou-Kogetsidis 2010) proved problematic.

The lexical, or manually signed, components one might anticipate ascribing to these categorizations are invariably further modified by accompanying non-manual features. For example, while in English the modal verb *can* might not be considered a *downtoner*, the sign CAN could be considered differently. Firstly, it is not essential to use the sign CAN in polar questions that translate as *can I*, because the question form may be conveyed effectively through non-manual features alone. Secondly, the signs CAN and POSSIBLE are identical, and glossed differently only to match any accompanying English mouthings. Thirdly, the manual element of the sign is generally accompanied by raised eyebrows which appear to serve multiple functions in this context: to indicate

polar questioning and also to contribute towards mitigation of the request by minimizing degree of imposition and acting as a form of *consultative device* for engaging with the interlocutor. With the sign CAN the accompanying non-manual features seemed to be inseparable from the lexical component. Further non-manual features might also be used here, for example with a side tilt and tight lips or polite grimace mouth gestures. The intent associated with the sign CAN is provided by the accompanying non-manual features, therefore categorization based on the lexical/manual component alone is misleading.

Sometimes internal modification may be conveyed through non-manual forms alone, usually via an array of features used simultaneously. An initial attempt at categorizing non-manual features for internal modification lead to a realization that most types of internal modification can be fulfilled by most types of non-manual feature, often produced in combination. Occasionally the internal modification function of a non-manual feature could be categorized, as in the following example where the use of raised brows in (CAN GO) suggests they act as a consultative device, while the polite grimace in phrase final position, performed with no manual component, could be considered as an *appealer*.

(7)   (Participant 1)
       WANT BOOK TIME OFF WORK NEXT-WEEK BECAUSE BOOK HOLIDAY
                                                     raised brows   polite grimace
       LAST NIGHT CHEAP   CAN GO NEXT-WEEK PLEASE
       'I want to book time off work next week because I booked a cheap holiday last night. Would it be possible to have next week off please?'

In other instances, where no manual politeness marker PLEASE has been used, the non-manual features might be considered to function as a politeness marker but may also act as other forms of internal mitigation. In example (8) the entire comment was accompanied with raised brows.

(8)   (Participant 2)
       SATURDAY ME FLY-AWAY ME EARLY-MORNING CAN
       tight lips & polite duck   side tilt
       ASK-YOU   CAN LIFT GO WITH ME AIRPORT ME (pause)
       polite duck   headshake
       OK   (pause) i-f CAN'T FINE
       'I'm flying off early Saturday morning. Would it be at all possible to ask if you could give me a lift to the airport? Would that be ok? It's no problem if you can't.'

Here, categorization on the basis devised for spoken languages is less effective. The polite duck is used twice here, and could be considered to function as a politeness marker, a downtoner, a consultative device and an appealer. Appealers are a form of lexical/phrasal modification described as "addressee-oriented elements occurring in a syntactically final position. They may signal turn availability and are used to appeal to the listener's benevolent understanding" (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989: 285).

The data suggest that appealers tend to be conveyed non-manually in BSL and many of the elicited requests were completed with use of raised eyebrows, a polite mouth gesture and either/both the side tilt and polite duck. While Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) distinguish between *lexical/phrasal downgraders* and *syntactic downgraders*, the distinction in signed language is rather blurred. This is because the interrogative, aspectual and conditional structures outlined by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) may be conveyed non-manually, using the same array of features. The use of these categorizations to describe politeness in BSL is therefore problematic, and this framework was not a useful one to adopt in this study.

6 Limitations of the study

This exploratory study of linguistic politeness in BSL has presented a number of challenges, and my own presence within the data manifests itself in several ways. My identity as a non-Deaf, non-native signer has impacted on the entire research process (Young and Ackerman 2001), including the transcription and translation of the data, a process already complicated by the difficulties involved in representing visual data in a written form (Arndt and Janney 1987). Some of my influence on the data is transparent, such as the selection of participants who are familiar to me, but who are not representative of the wider Deaf community within the UK. Likewise, participants' use and description of linguistic politeness during the interviews may have been influenced by my non-Deaf identity, the format of the elicitation tasks and the questions asked. However, the key features identified in the elicited comments were reinforced by participants' own observations and comments in the interview dialogue, suggesting that their use may be more widespread.

The non-manual features observed and discussed in the data has potentially been restricted due to the two particular speech acts that were involved in the elicited comments: requests and apologies. This is compounded by the difficulties in obtaining naturally-occurring data in signed language (George

2011; Roush 2011). DCTs, the method employed by both Hoza (2001, 2007) and George (2011), have been found to influence lexical choice. For example, Golato (2003) found that, in German, 'danke' was found more often in written discourse completion responses than in naturally occurring dialogue for compliments. By combining the elicitation of comments within general interview dialogue about participants' use of language, I have attempted to broaden the scope of the data generated.

A more surreptitious influence on the data, less transparent to the reader, derives from my role as translator and transcriber. Though the end product is visible, the process of translation and transcription is not and therefore needs explication (Stone and West 2012). My approach to this translation is informed by both my motivation towards the study as a whole and my relationship with the participants. My translation style aimed to replicate the type of conversational language that would have been used had the participants been English speakers. The end product remains my personal interpretation of this. The influence of my translation carries on into the process of data analysis. For an exploratory study, thematic analysis was an appropriate method to employ (Braun and Clark 2006), and I followed the general approach to thematic networks outlined by Attride-Stirling (2001). However, this process was not straightforward as the words in the translation were mine, not the participants'. Coding was therefore looser than it might have been for a direct transcription, with coding of extended chunks of meaning rather than single lexical items, unless sign-word equivalence was unproblematic.

The present study forms a useful foundation for future research on linguistic politeness in BSL. Further research would benefit from observation of a wider range of speech acts, preferably in naturally-occurring dialogue and drawing on the perceptions of a greater number and wider range of members of the Deaf community. Analysis of non-manual features could also be enhanced through a more detailed account of their timing and duration.

7 Conclusion

Despite the limitations of the present study, this initial exploration of linguistic politeness in BSL reveals a number of interesting issues. The identification of specific non-manual features associated with polite BSL may usefully inform future studies on both politeness and sign language prosody, while the commonality with polite mouth gestures in ASL suggests that cross-linguistic studies could form a productive focus for further research. Additionally these data

may usefully inform BSL teaching and the training of BSL/English interpreters, reinforcing the importance and multi-functionality of non-manual features for students aiming to develop fluency in BSL as a second or additional language.

Researching signed language necessitates particular research methods that capture intonation, an aspect of politeness that is under-researched in spoken languages, and this presented a number of challenges. Analysis of the data proved problematic when attempting to employ the categorization schemes for syntactic and lexical/phrasal downgraders (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989) as these functions are conveyed non-manually in BSL. Although lexical, or manual, politeness markers exist in BSL, politeness is predominantly conveyed through specific accompanying non-manual features. Difficulties with analysis are compounded by the multi-functionality of these features, and the simultaneous production of multiple features. The data suggest that distinction between lexical/phrasal and syntactic downgraders is less meaningful when applied to analysis of signed language, and internal modification categorization (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989) is unreflective of language use in this modality.

Interaction and overlap between linguistic and paralinguistic use of non-manual features is evident when considering linguistic politeness in BSL. Though Sandler and Lillo-Martin (2006: 258) state that linguistic and paralinguistic use can be segregated, a holistic approach may be more useful when examining linguistic politeness. Trees and Manusov (1998) suggest that in speech verbal and nonverbal elements interact with each other in a complex way to influence perception of politeness. This complexity is mirrored in the interactions between specific non-manual features in signed language (de Vos et al. 2009) and exemplified in the use of raised eyebrows in the present study. This feature, commonly used in polar questions and equated to the use of rising intonation (Zeshan 2004), may be accompanied by other features to convey greater degrees of politeness in BSL. The data from the present study suggest that the association between raised pitch and politeness identified in speech (Brown and Levinson 1987; Félix-Brasdefer 2009) is carried across the modal divide, albeit in a different form. At first glance, politeness in spoken and signed languages might appear quite different, but this may be an oversimplification resulting from difference in research methods and focus. Though prosodic resources in signed language are more extensive than those used in speech, beneath the surface there may be more similarity between languages in signed and spoken modalities than might be assumed (Brentari et al. 2011; Vermeerbergen et al. 2007; de Vos et al. 2009). Future research might focus on comparing the timing of pitch contours, facial expression and body movements used in polite speech with the distribution of non-manual features in signed language.

Bionote

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