Gestures as illocutionary and discourse structure markers in Southern Italian conversation

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Abstract

In Southern Italy gesture use is prominent and many gestures are conventional. These include ‘pragmatic’ gestures that indicate type of speech act or aspects of discourse structure and ‘substantive’ gestures that express utterance content. Drawing from video-recordings of natural conversations made near Salerno, Italy, the contexts of use of four conventional ‘pragmatic’ gestures are described. The first two, the Mano a borsa (‘purse hand’) and the Mani giunte (‘praying hands’) are well known and have recognition as ‘quotable gestures’ or ‘emblems’. They express the illocutionary intent of the spoken utterances associated with them. The second two relate to discourse structure: The Finger Bunch, which is similar to the ‘purse hand’ in form, marks ‘topic’ as distinct from ‘comment’; the Ring, in which the tips of the index finger and thumb are brought into contact forming a circle, marks the ‘focality’ of a unit in relation to the theme. These latter do not have recognition as ‘emblems’ but they may be related to gestures that are similar in form that do. Factors that contribute to the conventionalization of gesture, and implications for the status of gestures in relation to language are discussed.

1. Introduction

Much co-speech gesturing is substantive, in the sense that it contributes to various aspects of the content of the utterance of which it is a part, whether literally or metaphorically. However, we may also speak of pragmatic gesturing, which expresses aspects of utterance structure, including the status of discourse segments with respect to one another, and the character of the ‘speech act’ or interactional move of the utterance. In this paper I shall report some observations on gesture use in conversations recorded in the region of Campania, Italy, where, it appears, a number of conventionalized gestures with pragmatic functions are in common use. Ges-
ture plays an especially prominent role in conversation in this part of Italy and this may be why it so often has a conventionalized character. Speakers frequently make use of gestural patterns taken from a repertoire that is widely shared. Drawing upon a corpus of video-recordings of naturally occurring conversations made near Salerno, I shall give examples to illustrate the uses of four of the most common patterns from this repertoire. Two of these, as I shall show, appear to serve as a way of indicating the type of interactional move a turn-taker is making. These shall refer to as illocutionary marker gestures. The other two serve to exhibit the role within a discourse of a particular phrase or segment of speech, relative to other segments. These shall call discourse unit marker gestures.

As we will see, of the gestural patterns described here, two are recognized by name among Italians. These are the Mano a borsa, or ‘purse hand’ and the Mani giunte, ‘joined hands’ – or ‘praying hands’ as they are sometimes referred to in English. They have been described by writers on Italian gesture, including De Jorio (1979 [1832]), Munari (1963), Effron (1972 [1941]), Poggi (1983a), and Diadori (1990), as if they have well-understood meanings, and can be used on their own, as a substitute for speech. They may thus be considered to be ‘emblems’ in the sense proposed by Ekman and Friesen (1969), or ‘quotable gestures’, as Kendon (1984, 1992) has proposed.

The other two gestures to be discussed, the discourse unit marker gestures, are not recognized or named as the Mano a borsa and the Mani giunte are, although they may well be related to forms that are. One of these gestures, here termed the Finger Bunch, which serves to mark discourse units differentially as topic in contrast to comment, is probably related to the Mano a borsa. The other, here to be called the Ring, serves to mark discourse units which are ‘focal’ to the theme or argument of what is being said. This may be related to a use of the same hand shape in a gesture that Diadori (1990) refers to as Mano ad anello – widely recognized both within Italy and elsewhere as the ‘OK gesture’ – and which also has been described by De Jorio (1979 [1832]). As will be clear later, these possible relationships suggest

1 This has been noted at least since the Eighteenth century, and not only in Campania, of course. See, for example, De Borch (1782), Blunt (1823), De Jorio (1832) 1979, Wiseman (1853), Lyall (1954), Barbieri (1964), D’Angelo (1969), and Gadea (1983). Burke (1991).

2 These recordings were made possible by a grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation of New York. They were made in April 1991 as part of a project in which the use of gesture in conversation in a culture where gesture is prominent is to be compared with its use in a culture where it is less prominent, as may be found in England. The material gathered in 1991 includes recordings of citizens in public places engaged in the daily evening passeggiata; members of a cultural club in a small town near Salerno playing cards together; a meeting of members of a theatre group discussing plans for their next production; members of the organizing committee of a bocce club talking informally, and then having a formal meeting about future club activities; a group of friends eating an evening meal together in a private home; conversations in the open at a market in a small rural community; and conversations among Salerno professionals in a small bar. I am deeply grateful to Professor Pina Boggi Cavallo of the University of Salerno, who hosted me at her institution and her home and helped me in many ways. I would like to thank Sandro Giordano, Enzo Forcellino and Mario Cesare for introducing me to situations where I could be present with my video-camera. I owe a very special debt to Maria De Simone of Salerno who provided transcriptions of the speech and translations.

how, at least in some cases, ‘emblems’ or ‘quotable gestures’ may have their origin in the conventionalization of gestural gestures or ‘illustrators’, as these have been called (Ekman and Friesen, 1969).

Several lists of Italian quotable gestures have been published (Pitri, 1877, 1887 for Sicily; De Jorio, 1979 [1832], for Naples; Effron, 1972 [1941], for Southern Italians; Munari, 1963, Gadea, 1983, and Diadori, 1990, for Italy as a whole), and they have been studied comparatively, both within Italy (Lamedica, 1982, Guido, 1990) and between Italy and elsewhere (Morris et al., 1979). There have also been some attempts at a semiotic analysis (Poggi, 1983a,b; Poggi and Zomparelli, 1987; see Kendon, 1992, for a review of this work) and some recognition studies (Ricci-Bitti et al., 1987). However, no one has attempted to examine how such gestures are used within the course of interaction and there have been very few studies in which use has been made of film or video-recordings of these gestures, as they occur in use in everyday situations. Effron (1972 [1941]) filmed immigrants in Manhattan in conversation and used his films as a resource for a stylistic analysis of their gestures. However, since sound synchronous recording was not available to him, his discussion of the relationship between gestures and speech necessarily remained impressionistic. The only other investigators who have filmed gestures in use in naturally occurring situations in Italy are Nico Lamedica (1987) and Diego Carpittella (1973, 1976, 1981, 1985). Lamedica undertook a comparative study of gesturing in different types of public speaking, but he did not include any analysis of how individual gestures from a gesture repertoire were used. Carpittella has published films of conversations in the streets of Naples in which the use of some quotable gestures may be observed, but he offers no analysis. The present paper is the first in which analysis of Italian quotable gestures as they are used in discourse, has been attempted.

The manual actions to which these names are applied are distinguishable from one another in terms of hand shape and hand orientation, and three of them, Mano a borsa, Mani giunte and Finger Bunch also each have a movement pattern associated with them that is characteristic. The Mani giunte requires two hands; the Mano a borsa and Finger Bunch are commonly one-handed, although both hands may enact the gesture simultaneously on some occasions. The Ring occurs typically as a one-handed gesture, although it, too, on occasion is enacted with both hands.

2. Illocutionary marker gestures: Mano a borsa and Mani giunte

2.1. Mano a borsa

In the ‘purse hand’ or Mano a borsa, as we will here refer to it, all the digits of the hand are held fully extended, but they are drawn together so that they are in contact with one another at their tips (Fig. 1). The hand, shaped in this fashion, is held with the palm facing upwards, although in some cases we see it with the palm facing somewhat toward the body mid-line. It may be moved up and down, often repeatedly, by forearm action, usually with movements of relatively short amplitude.
one has not understood what has been said or the action performed, but because one is questioning, and therefore criticizing, the motives of the speaker or actor. Poggi suggests that there may be systematic differences in how the gesture is performed, according to which kind of questioning it is being used for.

The examples we give here from our recorded material show that the gesture can accompany a spoken question, as if it serves as a kind of visual representation of the grammatical or intonation marking features of the speech. The gesture can also be employed in association with speech that is not, grammatically, a question but which, nevertheless, within its conversational context, serves as an implied question or as a challenge to something someone else has said. We also give an example similar to the negative pseudo-question use distinguished by Poggi, as just mentioned.

We begin with an example, Example 1 (Telephone 3: 7.33.24), in which the gesture appears to serve as the visual equivalent of the grammatical structure and intonation of the speech it accompanies. In this case it repeats, visually, the character of the speech act that is also given in the spoken form of the utterance. The speaker is asking another who he can contact in connection with some arrangement that must be made. As he asks the question ‘A chi voleva trascrivere a casa? – Who do I go to find now for this?’ he forms the Mano a borsa which is maintained throughout the utterance (Fig. 2).

In this example there seems to be a complete overlap between the spoken question and the Mano a borsa. However, we sometimes observe that the gesture may be continued well after the speaker has finished speaking. In this way the gesture can provide a visual cue that a question has been asked and an answer is expected. In the following instance, Example 2 (Standing Conversation 6: 7.44.46), the Mano a borsa is used in this way in a situation where the person to whom the question is being addressed has been momentarily distracted from the attentional focus of the conversation. Here, it would seem, the gesture serves to make clear that what has just been said is a question to which the speaker is expecting an answer (Fig. 3).

The discussion is about a telephone number. There is a need for a certain office to be contacted, but apparently the telephone numbers that have been obtained for this purpose are not correct. The speaker, VG, addressing Giovanni, says: ‘Addu u piglja’ su numero? eeeee Giao! – Where did you get this number? eh! Giao! [Giovanni]’.

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3 De Jorio’s treatise on Neapolitan gesture and its relationship to the gestures of the ancients, especially as these are depicted in the painted vases, mosaics and frescoes of Herculanenum and Pompeii, remains important as a source for accounts of gestural expression in Naples in the early nineteenth century and is also insightful about the nature of gesture and its use in interaction. Cocchiara (1959), Magli (1980, 1986), Schmitt (1984) Gadeau (1986) and Haskell (1993: 155–158) provide comments from a modern perspective. De Jorio’s was re-set and re-published in 1964 by the Associazione Napoletana per i Monumenti e il Paesaggio with an introduction by Giuseppe Cocchiara. In 1979 Arnaldo Forni issued an anastatic reprint of the 1832 edition which preserves the original pagination. All references to De Jorio’s book in this paper are to this 1979 reprint.

4 Speakers in our recordings use both a form of Italian and a local Campanian dialect. Since this latter is close to Neapolitan, we have followed the spelling conventions given in Fierro (1989) and D’Ascoli (1990). Note that in writing Neapolitan much use is made of the apostrophe to indicate that certain word segments are dropped in certain environments. It indicates elision, as in ‘l’ommo = lo uomo (Italian: ‘l’omo ‘the man’); n’abbocco = no abbozzo (Italian: un abbozzo ‘a sketch’); the deletion of the final element of a word (apocope), as in guagllo = guaglione (Italian: ragazzo ‘boy, youth’) or so’ = sopno (Italian: sono ‘I am’); or the deletion of an initial sound (aphtharesis), as in ‘e mariuile = le mariule (Italian: i ladri ‘the thieves’) or ‘o marito = lo marito (Italian: il marito ‘the husband’). A full explanation, with an account of the circumstances in which these different elisions occur in Neapolitan may be found in Fierro (1989: 25–19).
Just as VG begins, saying "Ma dove – But where?", there is a rattle at the window. He interrupts his speech and cranes his neck to see who it is and then calls out "Ohe!" At the same time G turns round to look. Both immediately recognize the person at the window as the young son of another who is present. G walks over to the window to let him in. Fully understanding the situation, VG does not wait for Giovanni to return, but calls his question out to him as he walks away, gesturing with a forward reach [3] and retrieval movement [4] as he does so. This is an action that looks like an act of 'grasping' and is thus semantically consonant with the verb Piglia – 'take, seize, grasp'. Then, as if attempting to recall Giovanni's attention, he adds: 'Eeeeee Giao!'. It is just here that he uses the Mano a borsa [5]. He sustains this gesture for some time after he has finished speaking (although now his hand does not move – the gesture is 'held') [6], as he waits for G to turn back and walk toward him, answering his question as he does so. Here, evidently, the Mano a borsa is being employed in such a way as to refer back to what has just been said. It signals that a question has been asked and that an answer is expected.

In the next example, Example 3 (Standing Conversation 17: 7.51.07), taken from a discussion of a robbery, the speaker states certain facts, then asks his interlocutor to draw a conclusion. VG has been asking G about who had investigated whether certain doors were open or closed, and he says: "Chill ric' ca hann' travat aperta

cella porta? – He said that they found the door open?" To this G replies: 'Non hann' travat niente aperto! La 'ncopp non è stauccato niente [...]. perciò – They found nothing open! Over there nothing had been touched. Therefore – '. As he says '"perciò – therefore' he lifts his hand in a Mano a borsa. He is asking VG to explain what inferences he might draw from the facts he had been provided with. The '"perciò' and the Mano a borsa together serve to place VG in the position of someone who is now expected to answer a question (Fig. 4). Once again we may note how the Mano a borsa is held beyond the end of the speech, thus sustaining G's position in the conversation as one who is expecting a reply to what he has just said.

The Mano a borsa is not only used as a means of indicating that the speaker is asking a question. It can also be used as a means of indicating a reported question. This is illustrated in Example 4 (Standing Conversation 17: 7.51.07), also taken from the discussion about the robbery. VG has asked about a certain door that appears to have been opened by someone, and the question was: why had it been opened? Giovanni replies that this was done by someone who himself had a question: there was another door that he could see by opening the door VG is asking about. By doing this he could see whether this door was open or closed (Fig. 5). As he says "se stava chiuso
Standing Conversation 17: 7.51.07.

VG  | Chill' ric' cha han' trov' aperta chella porta?  
    | He said that they found that door open?

G  | Non han' trov' niente aperto!
    | They found nothing open!

La lessop nun è sta tuccato niente [...] perciò

| [ ]  | [ ]  | [ ]  | [ ]  |
| [ ]  | [ ]  | [ ]  | [ ]  |
| [ ]  | [ ]  | [ ]  | [ ]  |

Finger bunch  Finger spread

They found nothing open!

Down there nothing had been touched [...] Therefore ...

Fig. 4.

o stava aperto – if it was closed or was open” he forms his hand into a Mano a borsa
[3], thus marking the segment that reports the question that he is reporting.

It may be noted that in Example 3, where the speaker is using the Mano a borsa
in conjunction with a question he himself is directing to his interlocutor, he holds his
hand up, almost at the level of his face, and somewhat away from his body. From the
other examples depicted here, it will be apparent that this is a characteristic position.
It is interesting to note, therefore, that in Example 4, when the same speaker is now
using the Mano a borsa in conjunction with a reported question, the hand is held low-
down and close to the body. This contrast raises the question as to whether there may
be consistent differences in how this gesture is performed in association with differences
in how it is used. Poggi (1983a) also hints at this possibility. Finer grained
analysis thus appears warranted.

In the next example, Example 5 (Standing Conversation 10: 7.45.45), we see how
the Mano a borsa may be used to show that what is being said implies a question for
the other person, even if the spoken part of the utterance does not have the grammati-
cal or intonational structure of a question. Here, the speaker challenges some-
thing that someone has just said by saying something that contradicts it. Someone
has suggested a certain telephone number but the speaker (DP) maintains that this
number is a Salerno number. This implies that the number just mentioned cannot be
correct. DP says: “Che' ventire? Ventire è Salerno, scus nu mumento! – What is
twenty-three? Twenty-three is Salerno, excuse me one moment!” As he says “scus
nu mumento”, however, his hand forms the Mano a borsa, and this has the force of
questioning what the previous speaker has just said. Note how the Mano a borsa
is held after he has finished speaking. In fact DP holds the Mano a borsa gesture until
his interlocutor has completed his reply to what DP says (Fig. 6).
As SG says "Che' dimostr'e? – to show what?" he moves his hand outward, posed in Mano a borsa [2]. In association with each one of the phrases that then follow in this utterance he makes a different movement of the arm-inward [3], toward himself touching his chest [4], forward again (although in a different direction than before) [5], and then in-out movements of shorter amplitude, [6] and [7]. Throughout, however, he holds his hand in Mano a borsa and in this way marks the whole of this utterance as having the role of questioning that of the previous speaker – bracketing or framing it as being a single unit that serves to challenge what he has said (Fig. 7).

Standing Conversation 11: 7:46.23
SG  Che' dimostr'e? Chell' è stata semp aperto lo u sacco.

Standing Conversation 11: 7:45.45
DP  Chi' venti tre? Venti tre è Salerno, scus nu momento!

Right hand as
Mano a borsa
[1] lowered
[2] moves outward
[3] moves inward, held
[4] touches chest

To demonstrate what? That it was always open? I know that.

Io ieri sera agg lasciata aperta. Mo' a trovo chiusa [......]

[6] moves outward, held
[7] moves inward

I yesterday evening had left [it] open. Now I found [it] closed.

Fig. 7.

The Mano a borsa can also be used as a device which serves to question someone's actions, rather than the substance of what they are saying, as if to say "What are you doing?" with the implication that whatever it is you are doing, you should stop doing it. In this usage it can accompany an assertion, as will be seen in Example 7 (Theatre Group: 9:11.06), where SG reprimands his son in a discussion for raising his voice too high. He says "Avascia a voce. Chisto allucca pure! – Lower your voice! This is shouting indeed!" As SG says to his son: "Avascia a voce – Lower your voice" and adds "Chisto allucca pure! – This is shouting indeed!" he uses the Mano a borsa. This adds the meaning of "What do you think you are doing?" to the statements he makes.5

Finally, examples should be noted in which the Mano a borsa is used in the absence of speech, the gesture by itself constituting an utterance. One context of use for this is that a participant uses the Mano a borsa when withdrawing from an exchange of turns with another, because of disagreement, either to move on to a new topic of discussion or to participate in some other activity. The one who, in withdrawing from the exchange, uses the Mano a borsa, appears to be the participant who is unwilling to continue the argument, as if unwilling to continue to try to convince

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5 An alternative interpretation, suggested to me by Daniele Gambaram, is that the Mano a borsa here has the force of challenging the addressee to deny the speaker's assertion – in effect making his utterance into a rhetorical question, as if he might have said "is this not pure shouting?"
2.2. Mani giunte – ‘Joined hands’, ‘Praying hands’

The next gesture to be discussed is one in which the two hands, each with fingers extended and adducted, are placed in contact, palms facing one another rather as is done in the gesture commonly employed among Christians as a gesture of religious prayer. Here, we will refer to it with its usual Italian name as Mani giunte – literally ‘joined hands’. Like the Mano a borsa it has been recognized in various gesture vocabularies where it is said to indicate that the person using it is making an entreaty of some sort. De Jorio (1979: 262 [1832]) says that it is “one of the gestures more used among us for denoting that one is begging for indulgence”. He suggests that it serves to express this idea because, by placing the hands together in this fashion, one shows that one’s hands are tied together, therefore they are not free to act. Diadori (1990: 50, Nos. 60 and 61) shows two slightly different versions. One of these (No. 60), she says, “gives to the question a connotation of entreaty (pregheira), of imploring someone insistently” and can be glossed with phrases such as “Per favore! Per piacere! – Please!” or “Ti prego! – I ask you, I implore you!”. The other (No. 61) “gives to the question an imploring tone, often in order to express that it is impossible for oneself to do something”. It may be interpreted as equivalent to phrases such as “Come posso fare? – What can I do?” or “E io posso farci? – And I, what can I do about it?”

There are many examples of this gesture in our corpus of recorded material. Like the Mano a borsa, this gesture commonly accompanies spoken utterances and, when it does so, it makes visible certain implications of what is being said that may not be made explicit verbally. The theme most common to the uses we have observed so far is that of an appeal to the addressee to accept conditions implied by what is being said, which would have the consequence of relieving the speaker of certain responsibilities. In some cases, in a different, but related usage, the gesture serves as an appeal to the listener to accept the logical consequences of what the speaker has been saying.

The usage we have observed most commonly is illustrated first, in Example 8 (Theatre Group: 9.03.17). In a situation where the speaker is being asked to explain why he does not want to take a certain part in a play, he says: “Qua abbiamo parlato per una riunione intera l’altra volta – That we discussed for an entire meeting last time”. As he says this, he enacts Mani giunte. In this way he shows that his statement implies that another discussion is not necessary, hence he should be relieved of the requirement to discuss the issue again. Likewise (Example 9, Telephone 4: 7.33.29), when it has been suggested to VG that he should make a telephone call, he replies: “Ma io tengo un curioso su momento – But I have a council meeting in a moment”. The implication of this statement is that it would not be possible for him to make the telephone call. As he says this, he enacts Mani giunte – thus making it clear that he is asking the other person to accept this implication, and so relieve him of the responsibility of making the call (Fig. 8).

In the next two examples a speaker asks his interlocutor directly to act differently as a consequence of what he is saying. In the first example, Example 10, he appeals to him to recognize that he understands the argument with which he disagrees; in the second (Example 11), he appeals to his interlocutor to carry out his suggestion. Here the illocutionary character of his utterance is explicitly expressed, nevertheless Mani giunte is used.

Example 10 (Standing Conversation 10: 7.46.38) is from the conversation about the burglary already quoted from. There is a puzzle about why a thief should have gone to the trouble of breaking down a door when the door was always open. One speaker has suggested that he did this in order to put others off the scent, to mislead
Telephone 4: 7.33.29.

Ma io tengo a censiglio nu momento

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Mani giunte

But I have a council meeting in a moment.

Fig. 8

them as to how he got into the building he had robbed. SG counters by saying that what the previous speaker has just said does not allow one to draw any conclusion in the matter. He says: “Ho capito, però non te lo dice perché tu sai che quella porta stava aperta [...] Cioè se venev a cca sul io – I’ve understood, however it does not tell you anything because you know that that door was open, that is if I came from there by myself” His preface, “Ho capito – I’ve understood” shows that he claims to have understood the other’s argument. This serves to show that SG has taken into consideration what the other has said. As he says “Ho capito – I’ve understood”, however, he uses Mani giunte, and this suggests that he is also appealing to his interlocutor to accept his counter argument, given that he has taken into consideration the other point of view.

Example 11 (Standing Conversation 8: 7.45.23) comes from a discussion about a telephone number. A certain telephone number has been obtained but, when it is tried, it proves to be a number for a society that deals with hunting, not with a society which deals with bocce (a form of bowls played on a hard court), which is what is wanted. Here the speaker, SG, suggests that they should look in the telephone book to check the number. As he makes this suggestion he uses Mani giunte. However, he maintains this hand-arrangement over a lengthy stretch of speech, during which he also moves his hands in a succession of contrasting gesture phrases performed in relation to the spoken phrases of his discourse. Each of the successive phrases of his speech are distinguished by contrasting segments of movement, at the same time as he maintains the Mani giunte arrangement (Fig. 9). Thus, he forms Mani giunte just in advance of his speech [1]; directs his hands to the piece of paper VG is holding (where the telephone number is written) [2]; then he directs them upward and left [3]; he retracts them close to his chest [4], lowering them by forearm rotation over “tefonico” [4a]; he then directs his hands forward toward VG (his addressee) and then retracts them [5]; he moves his hands up and down repeatedly (apparently) in time with the syllables of “Cacciatore” etc. [6]; and then he continues to hold his hands in Mani giunte for a sustained period after he has stopped speaking [7]. All of his discourse, thus, is gesturally labeled at one level while, at the same time, other aspects of the discourse are also being marked in gesture.

Standing Conversation 8: 7.45.23

SG

Eh e allora perché non si prende elenco telefonico

Eh and then why not take the telephone book

... e si vede Società Caccia tori coopp [...]

and see the Hunting Society in it [...]

Mani giunte

Fig. 9.

The Mani giunte arrangement used here marks SG’s discourse as an appeal to others to take a certain line of action, at the same time as his gesturing also performs other functions. In this respect it is comparable to the use of the Mano a borsa described in Example 6 (see Fig. 7). It is also to be noted how the Mani giunte arrangement is sustained for some time after the speaker has finished, and only relinquished when the subject of the conversation shifts away from the topic of the telephone number. The gesture is kept up, that is, rather as the Mano a borsa is kept up in the examples described in Examples 2, 3 or 5 (Figs. 3, 4 or 6), evidently as a way of displaying the continued stance of the speaker as that of making an appeal.
A somewhat different use of *Mani giunte* is seen in the next two examples, Examples 12 and 13. In these the *Mani giunte* is used in association with a component of an utterance in which the premise of an argument is being expressed. The role of the gesture here seems to be that of giving visible evidence of the appeal the speaker is making to the other to accept this premise. We suppose that this appeal is expressed here by the gesture because it is said to be a “gesture of appeal”. However, it may be that what is expressed by *Mani giunte* here is the speaker’s view that he is powerless to change the premise on which he is basing his argument, because the premise is an undeniable fact. In consequence, accordingly, the listener must accept the premise.\(^6\)

In Example 12 (AVIS: 6.59.06), the speaker is putting forward a point that he believes should be taken into consideration as supporting a particular point of view. There has been a discussion about how youths in Salerno are outwitting the police who try to get them to walk their motor scooters in a certain street that has been reserved for pedestrians. The speaker, who has been complaining about the bad behaviour of contemporary youth, describes how he has observed them re-mounting their motor scooters, once they are too far away for the police to catch them. He goes on to comment as follows: “E’ evidente il fatto che il ragazzo non è cretino, quello è nato giù con la forbice. Da una parte è meglio non è che sono cresciuti come noi, un poco rimbambiti forse. – It is evident that the boy is not stupid, that he is born already with intelligence. From one point of view it is better that they have not grown up as we, a little childish, perhaps”. That is, he suggests that boys are growing up clever, they are not like innocent children any more, and perhaps this is a good thing. As he utters the first sentence, in which he states that “it is evident” that youths are not born stupid, he uses *Mani giunte*. Here he makes an appeal to the other to accept the premise expressed here, so that what follows from it will also be accepted.

Example 13 (Vietri Cena: 10.56) is taken from a recording of a dinner party. The discussion concerns the nature of alcoholism. Enrico has been maintaining that an alcoholic is someone who does not have the sense to stop drinking after they have got drunk. His interlocutor, Alessandra, on the other hand, maintains that alcoholics are not able to control their drinking. She maintains that they continue to drink involuntarily even after they have become drunk. She says “Ma’ Ma se uno è non è ubriaco, e si beve un bicchiere l’alcolista si ubriaca. E’ chiaro quello continua a bere anche se si è mbriacato. – But, but if he is- he is not drunk and he drinks a glass, the alcoholic becomes drunk. It is clear that he continues to drink even if he has become drunk”.

The gesturing accompaniment is complex, but over the concluding segment of the discourse, where she says “anche se si è mbriacato – even if he is drunk” Alessandra uses *Mani giunte* (Fig. 10). In this case, it is the premise of her argument that the drinker should be drunk, and it is when she utters this that she uses *Mani giunte*, appealing to her interlocutor to accept this.

\(^6\) The second interpretation given here was suggested to me by an anonymous reviewer.
3. Discourse unit marking gestures

The *Mano a borsa* and *Mani giunte* are examples of gestures which, as we have said, appear to give visible expression to the illocutionary act intended by the speaker. The nature of this act may be clear from the way in which the utterance is placed within the discourse, but the gesture makes it explicit. The two gestures to be discussed next have a different function. They appear to serve as if they are labels for segments or units within a discourse, thereby indicating the part these units play within the discourse structure. Thus the first gesture discussed here serves to distinguish topic from comment in a discourse. The second specifies that a given piece of discourse has a particular kind of privileged status in respect to other pieces.

3.1. The Finger Bunch

The term Finger Bunch will be used to refer to a gesture in which the hand is held with fingers drawn together, much as in the *Mano a borsa*, but in which it is moved forward or downward, away from the self, rather than upwards and towards the self, as is done in the *Mano a borsa*. This gesture often appears in association with that part of a discourse in which the speaker is specifying a topic. Commonly, as the hand in this arrangement is moved away or downwards, it opens and the fingers are extended and spread. This opening of the hand appears to occur in association with that part of the discourse that provides the comment on the topic specified.

The Finger Bunch is often formed by a sort of grasping action: the hand is initially open, fingers extended and straight, with the palm of the hand facing away from the speaker, or laterally. Then, as the fingers close rapidly into the bunch arrangement, the forearm is twisted so that palm is now facing upwards, the hand now assuming a pose quite similar to that of the *Mano a borsa*. This grasping action has been interpreted by some as an action symbolic of seizing something and holding it. It is as if, in this gesture, the gesturer grasps the topic being specified, holds it up or moves it toward the interlocutor and then, in the terminal finger opening action, the comment made on the topic is presented.

An example illustrating this (Example 15; Theatre Group: 9.01.23) is taken from the Theatre Group discussion, where we see the transition from Finger Bunch to open hand. Two closely related usages are illustrated. First, we see the specification of the agent of an action associated with Finger Bunch and the opening of the hand associated with specifying the action to be taken. Then we see the Finger Bunch associated with specification of a topic, followed by open-hand in association with a comment on that topic (Fig. 11).

SG, who is the chairman of the Theatre Group, is trying to set out some order for the discussion. He says: "*Eh sentite! Non uh noi [*] cominciamo a a discutere una cosa alla volta!* C'è o problem? Sessa accumiscia' ra addo sessa accumiscia' – Hey listen! No uh... let's begin to discuss one thing at a time. Here is the problem: one should start from where one should begin" [i.e., we should start with the question of when we will begin the production]. The relationship between speech and gesture in this example is set out in Fig. 12.

As the speaker says "*Eh sentite! – Hey listen!*" he holds up his hand in a ‘halt’ gesture [1]. Then, over the hesitant speech that follows, "*Non uh – Not – Not uh – We!*" he forms his hand into a ‘bunch’ which is held poised at the level of his cheek [2], [3]. Then, as he begins with "*cominciamo – let us begin!*" he thrusts his hand forward, fingers spread, palm facing away [4] and, as he completes this word, he twists his forearm to bring his palm to face him, drawing the fingers together again to form the Finger Bunch [5], which is then maintained, with some short forward movements, until he says "*una cosa alla volta – one thing at a time!*" when he moves his hand forward and spreads his fingers [6], [6a]. Thus, as he states the topic – that there is to be discussion – he forms the Finger Bunch; as he states the nature of this discussion – "one thing at a time" – he opens his hand.
This gestural sequence is now repeated over the next part of his speech. As he says ‘
C’è c o problem – Here is the problem’ we see the Finger Bunch again [7, 8].
He maintains this as he continues with: ‘Sessa accuminie’ ra – One must begin
now’ [10]. The hand moves down over ‘addo sessa accuminacie’ – from where one
must begin’ [11] and then opens [11a]. Here he presents his recommendation for
the problem specified.

In Example 16 (Theatre Group: 9.06.35) another, closely related use of the Finger
Bunch is illustrated in which it is used in association with the expression of the
essence or theme of a discourse. This is also taken from the Theatre Group record-
ning. SG, the leader, suggests a schedule of rehearsals which would mean that the
group would work up the play in the spring, then do two rehearsals in September
before the final performance. Someone raises the problem of what would be done
during the summer. In his reply SG implies that if everyone takes their obligation
to the play seriously this should not present a problem. He ends by saying: ‘... comunque simmo [... potenzialmente siamo professionisti, insomma. – ... anyhow,
we are [...] potentially we are professionals, in short’. The relationship between ges-
ture and speech in this passage is shown in Fig. 13.

Theatre Group: 9.06.35
SG comunque simmo [...] potenzialmente siamo professionisti, insomma
both hands in ‘Finger bunch’

Fig. 13.

SG’s right hand is extended forward and held open just before he continues speak-
ing [6] and as he says ‘comunque’ he closes his right hand into Finger Bunch [7]
and moves it left [7a]. As he says ‘potenzialmente siamo’ he moves his Finger
Bunch hand [8] in an outward circular movement that probably serves as an ‘inclus-
ive deictic’ to the assembled company; then, as he says ‘professionisti,
insomma’ he draws both hands toward himself in Finger Bunch [9], shaking them
forward and back in small-amplitude movements [10], before holding them in this
position for a brief period during the pause in speech that follows [11]. It will be
seen how the closing of the hand to Finger Bunch here is associated with an asser-
tion as to ‘what we are’, an assertion of the essence of the company’s being – its
quality as professionals that should ensure that the members would be responsible
about doing the play.

3.2. Finger Bunch and Mano a borsa: Possible relationships

The Finger Bunch and its transformation into open hand is not described by
Diadoni nor do we find it distinguished as such in De Jorio. However, in his discus-
sion of the gesture we have here termed Mano a borsa, De Jorio justifies its hand
shape with the following words: ‘... by uniting together in a single point all the
fingers of the hand one means to say: Unite your ideas, gather your many words into
one, or in brief, into a point, and tell me what you wish to say’ (De Jorio, 1979: 85
[1832]). For De Jorio, thus, the bringing of the fingers into a bunch, lowering the hand at the same time, is a gesture used to
express the idea of the essence or substance of a discourse.

It seems that if we consider these two gestures from the point of view of the
metaphors they constitute, we can see a relationship between them, for a similar
metaphor is employed in both: the metaphor of bringing a set of things together,
uniting them into a common object, or of grasping on to something that is small
and light, something that can be held with the tips of the fingers, as might befit the notion of the ‘essence’ of that something. It is the upward and speaker-directed movement of the Mano a borsa that carries the question implication – as if the movement
enacts a desire on the part of the speaker to draw towards himself the topic that
the other has been referring to. In the downward or interlocutor-directed movement of the Finger bunch, on the other hand, we have a movement that suggests holding on
to something. The ‘grasp’ movement by which the Finger bunch is formed is conso-
nant with this interpretation.

The Mano a borsa achieves the status of ‘emblem’ or ‘quotable gesture’ because,
in the right context, it can be used as a substitute for a complete speech act. It can be used
in this way because, as we have seen, it marks a turn at talk at the level of its role as
a speech act. Thus it can be seen to stand for a type of interactional move. It is ‘detach-
able’ from any particular spoken structure and thus it can gain recognition as a ‘quotable
gesture’. The Finger Bunch, on the other hand, operates at the level of the internal
structure of discourse. It cannot be ‘detached’ from the spoken structures that it marks, and
thus it is not accorded ‘quotable gesture’ status. Both are conventionalized forms, how-
ever, and both, as we have suggested, make use of the same metaphorical action.

In most discussions of gesture it is customary to maintain a distinction between
‘illustrators’ or ‘gesticulations’ on the one hand, and ‘emblems’ or ‘quotable ges-
tures’ on the other. ‘Illustrators’ are said to be gestures that co-occur with speech and
have an improvised, idiosyncratic character. ‘Emblems’, on the other hand, are iden-
tified as conventionalized gestures that can be used as utterances in their own right,
without being associated with speech. Here, however, we see that one form, the
Mano a borsa, though recognized as an ‘emblem’, is yet often used in conjunction
with speech. On the other hand, we have what appears to be a related conventional-
ized form, the Finger Bunch, which is not accorded the status of ‘emblem’. This sug-
gests that the distinction between ‘emblem’ and ‘illustrator’ cannot be maintained as
a matter of rigid typology. Rather than dividing gestures into types, it is better to
think of them as constituting a mode of expression that varies in the degree to which
it is conventionalized and also in the degree to which it is ‘detachable’ from speech.
One factor that affects ‘detachability’, it seems, is the aspect of an utterance to which

a gesture gives expression. Where it is its aspect as a 'speech act', insofar as the gesture serves to label the speech act as a 'type', there it can be used on its own, indicating that a type of 'speech act' is being done, without the speech itself. Where it is the internal structure of discourse that is being expressed, the gesture cannot be 'detached' and so it is not recognized as an 'emblem'. In other respects, however, they are the same.

3.3. The Ring

In this gesture the tip of the index finger is brought into contact with that of the thumb, so that there is a circular or oval-shaped gap between them. Usually, the other fingers of the hand are extended and spread apart (see Fig. 14). This handshape occurs in a number of different quotable gestures that have been described by De Jorio (1979 [1832]), Efron (1972 [1941]), Munari (1963), Morris et al. (1979) and Diadoli (1990), among others. Whether or not there is a relationship between these forms and the form as we see it here, as a discourse unit marking gesture, will be considered after we have discussed the observations we have made on its use in the corpus of material we have to hand here.

Fig. 14. The 'ring'. (From De Jorio, 1832.)

In our corpus of recorded conversations there are many instances of the Ring and a review of these suggests that it has several different, though related, usages. These may be summed up by saying that the Ring occurs in association with a segment of speech that provides precise information, makes a specific reference to something, makes something specific in contrast to other possibilities or in contrast to something more general, or which gives a specific example of something.

Thus, in Example 17 (Telephone 1: 7.33.05), someone gives a specific piece of information which he maintains is correct, opposing it to specific information suggested by his interlocutor. VG has just pointed to a particular telephone number written on a poster, suggesting that this is the one that is wanted. UA, however, maintains this is not correct and he quotes a number that someone has given him. He says: "'A me mi ha dato ventitre ventiquattro seidici – To me he has given me twenty-three, twenty-four, sixteen". As he quotes the number, his hand forms the Ring.

As this utterance begins, the speaker, UA, is looking at the poster and has his right hand extended to it, pointing to the telephone number printed on the poster with his index finger [1]. As he completes ‘A me mi ha dato – to me he has given me’ he turns to look at his interlocutor, moving his hand away from the poster and forming it into a Ring [2]. He maintains Ring as he quotes the number, moving his hand downwards each time in association with the stressed syllable in each of the three numbers he utters [3a,b,c] (Fig. 15).

A similar example, Example 18 (AVIS: 6.38.07), comes from a discussion about whether giving blood leads to raised blood pressure. One of the speakers has said that she used to give blood but the last time she went to do so she was told she could not because her blood pressure was too high. Her interlocutor, who has given blood many times, maintains that there is no relationship between how often one gives blood and one's blood pressure. He says: "Veramente io ci ho dato parecchi litri, parecchi – e tengo la pressione signora cento trenta ottanta – truly I have given many litres, many, and I have pressure, madam, one hundred and thirty, eighty". As he specifies his blood pressure reading he uses the Ring (Fig. 16).
madam, one hundred and thirty, eighty'' during which he lowers his hand three times, in each case in association with the stressed syllables [3a,b,c].

A third example, Example 19 (AVIS: 6.58.57), comes from a discussion about badly behaved youths in Salerno. The speaker, who is a bus driver, has been complaining about the bad behaviour of young people on the buses and he goes on to illustrate how they disobey the police. There is a traffic-free street in Salerno where people who wish to pass with their motor scooters are not allowed to ride them, but must dismount, and walk with them. According to the speaker the young people he complains of dismount at the bottom of the street where there is a policeman but then, a short time afterwards, they get on again. He says: ''Dopo, dopo trenta metri li ho visti io salt sopra e salgono lo stesso!'' - After, after thirty metres I have seen them get up [on their bikes] and they go up [the street] all the same''. As he specifies the distance, ''thirty metres'', he uses the Ring.

In Examples 17, 18, and 19, then, precise information is being provided and, in each case, where this is done it is accompanied by the Ring. What motivates the use
his reply here, VG repeats his statement that the door was closed, confirming a situation which he has been asked about twice before. His use of the Ring here seems to emphasize that part of his speech which specifies the situation.

A little further on, in the same discussion, SG wants to make it clear that the situation being discussed is one in which the door was closed by a key, locked, that is to say, not just pulled shut. He says (Example 21, Standing Conversation 15: 7.47.41):

"Ma chiesa nai cca parmali chiai, non chiesa di accostato. — But we talk of it closed by the key, not closed by being pulled to". As he refers to the door being closed by the key he uses the Ring, using this hand form, thus, in association with the aspect he wishes to emphasize, gesturing differently over the second part of the utterance (Fig. 17).

As he says "Ma chiesa – but closed" his hand assumes Ring with palm facing downwards [1]. As he says "nai cca parmali chiav – we speak of that key" the hand in Ring is now lifted, palm facing outwards [2]. Over the remainder, "non chiesa di accostato – not closed from being pushed to", he lowers his hand, now fully spread [3], then pushes it forward with palm facing outwards [4]. Here, then, we see the Ring apparently being used to label the specific situation to be dealt with, in contrast with other possible situations.

### 3.4. Relationships with quotable gestures using the Ring handshape

The examples given in section 3.3 illustrate some of the uses of the Ring we have observed as it occurs in discourse, serving as a marker indicating the status of certain units within a discourse. As we mentioned above, the Ring handshape occurs in several related gestures described by other writers. We will now consider these briefly and discuss whether or not there is a relationship between its uses as a discourse unit marking gesture, as described here, and its uses in quotable gestures.

De Jorio (1979 [1832]) describes the use of the Ring handshape in six different gestures. These are gestures that refer to love and friendship, obscene insult, a gesture that refers to tobacco, asking a question, justice, and perfection. In respect to each of these he is careful to describe how they differ from one another in terms of such features as movement, whether of the fingers or of the arm as a whole, the orientation of the hand, or its position in relation to the rest of the body. It is clear from his account that the gestures referring to friendship and love, to an obscene expression, and to tobacco are unrelated to one another. In each case the use made of the Ring handshape is for quite a different reason. It seems possible, however, that the gestures using the Ring handshape which have the meanings of asking a question, justice, and perfection, are related to one another. Furthermore, it seems possible that it is here that we may find a relationship between these quotable forms and the discourse unit marker use of the Ring that we have described.

First of all, De Jorio (ibid.: 171) writes of the "The tips of the fingers, that is the index finger and the thumb tightly conjoined, pointing downwards, in the form of a cone" as a gesture used in expressing the idea of 'justice'. He says it will do so, so long as the hand is held still, with the palm facing downwards. Elsewhere, in his discussion of gestures expressing the idea of 'perfection', he adds that the same gesture as that used for 'justice' is used by the lazzaroni in Naples as the equivalent of the French expression comme il faut which, he says "they [i.e. the lazzaroni] pronounce with much grace, energy and exactness". This expression, and its associated gesture, or just the gesture by itself, was used to denote something that is the best of its kind (see De Jorio, ibid.: 252). For De Jorio, then, this hand arrangement, when deployed with the palm oriented downward and held in front of the gesturer, could refer to something that is 'just' or 'perfect'.

In Italy today the thumb and forefinger in contact at their tips and forming a circle is recognized as a form meaning 'perfect' or 'OK'. This is clear from Diadori who presents a handshape labelled as "Te dita ad anello – the fingers as ring" (Diadoni, 1990: 39, No. 25) as indicating "approval for something that has been done well" suggesting that expressions such as "Tutto a posto – all in place", "Tutto bene – all well", "Va bene – it goes well", "perfetto – perfect" and "OK" would be appropriate glosses. Gesture 26 (ibid.: 38) in her list, in which "indice e pollice uniti ad anello – index and thumb united as a ring" is moved so it "draws a straight line", is also listed as having the same meanings. In a popular publication produced by (and for) Italian-Americans (Cangelosi and Carpini, 1989) the gesture given as meaning "va bene – OK" is one in which the thumb and forefinger make a circle. There seems little reason to doubt that De Jorio's 'justice' and 'perfection' gestures, which use the Ring, are related to the modern use of the Ring in the gesture commonly used with the meanings of "va bene, tutto a posto", and so forth, and which is also widely recognized outside Italy as the 'OK' gesture.

As for the use of this handshape as a gesture associated with asking a question, it appears that this is associated with questions in which what is being asked for is a clarification, a demand to make something correct or precise. Thus the theme of exactness or correctness is continued here. De Jorio's account seems to confirm this: he describes the use of the Ring as a questioning gesture as a "diminutive" of the Mano a borsa (De Jorio, 1979: 85–86 [1832]). Although the meaning of this is not immediately clear, we can gain some clue about what he had observed of it if we look at his account of its use in a scene between a public letter-writer and a woman who wants the letter-writer to compose a letter to be sent to her absent husband. This scene is depicted in Plate 2 of De Jorio's book, and is one of the tableaux of Neapolitan life for which his book is famous. In this tableau the woman is shown, in gesture, asking the letter-writer for a letter, but not knowing what she wants to say, other than that it should be about 'love'. De Jorio, in his commentary on this scene (ibid.: 325), describes how the letter-writer turns to her "surprised and a little annoyed, raising the left hand with the extremities of the index and of the thumb combined, asks her with the gesture, and as a true Neapolitan, with words together: 'What do you want me to write to him about?" From this we may infer first, that this gesture was used in conjunction with speech and second, that it was used, in the case where a question was being asked, in contexts where someone was being asked to be quite specific about something. Perhaps this is why De Jorio described this gesture as being a diminutive of the other question gesture. Here we find the idea of precision being expressed which, it seems not unreasonable to suggest, is also related to the idea of what is 'just', 'correct' or 'perfect'.
As we saw, according to our observations, the Ring is used in association with stretches of speech where something is being said that is specific, either in contrast to generalities, or in contrast to something else that is specific but to which the current segment of marked speech is to be opposed. It is also used to mark out a segment of discourse that plays a pivotal or focal role in an argument. Morris et al. (1979: 102–113) report, informally, a similar observation when they say that the Ring gesture “is commonly and unconsciously used during modern times, when groups of people gather for conversation. ... film analyses of the conversation sequences in which it occurs do reveal that it appears when speakers are making some point or requesting greater precision in some way”.

Morris et al. suggest that the Ring is an expression derived from the ‘precision grip’ of the hand. Once again, then, as with the Mano a borsa and Finger Bunch gestures discussed above, the Ring may be traceable to a form of metaphorical action – in this case one in which one seizes between the thumb and forefinger something very small, therefore very exact – thus something precise, something precisely placed, ‘just’ and ‘perfect’, therefore.

Such a gesture, when used by a speaker in conjunction with his own speech, as when it is used as a discourse unit marking gesture, since it indicates the precision of the statement being made or its ‘focality’ in an argument, is not ‘detached’ from the speech in this use. Hence it is not judged to be a ‘quotable gesture’. On the other hand, when the gesture is used, as it can be, as a comment on something someone else says or does, as when it is used to comment on something that is ‘perfetto’ or ‘OK’, then it can be judged to be ‘quotable’. We argue, thus, that the difference between the Ring gesture as a discourse unit marker, and the Ring gesture when it is seen in the various ‘OK’ forms is not a difference of type. The boundary is thus dissolved in this case, also, between what might be considered ‘illustrator’ and what might be considered ‘emblem’ or ‘quotable gesture’.

4. Conclusions

In the conversations that I have recorded from Southern Italy, I have illustrated how use is made of stylized gestures that accompany speech which have pragmatic, rather than substantive functions. I have described four gestural forms in common use in the conversations recorded. Two of these may be regarded as functioning as if they label the illocutionary force of the utterance of which they are a part, and I have termed them illocutionary marker gestures, accordingly. The other two gestures described function to indicate the status of units within a discourse, and have been termed discourse unit marker gestures.

In discussing these gestures I have compared them to descriptions that have been given of similar forms considered as autonomous gestures, identifiable as ‘emblems’ or ‘quotable’ gestures. In respect to both the Mano a borsa and the Ring, I have suggested that the ‘gesticulatory’ uses of these forms and the ‘quotable’ forms are related, in both cases because the ‘gesticulatory’ form of the gesture and the ‘quotable’ form use the same metaphorically expressive modes of action. In the case of both the Mano a borsa and the Finger Bunch it is suggested we have enactments of the metaphor either of ‘drawing different things together’ or of holding on to something thin, like a thread. In the case of the Ring, both as discourse unit marker and as the quotable ‘perfetto’ or ‘OK’ gesture, it is suggested that metaphorical use is made of a form of ‘precision grip’ in which something very small is being held on to.

The symbolic representation of events or actions in gesture as metaphors for abstract concepts is a fundamental feature of gestural expression and there is some reason to think that, at least within the same broad cultural tradition, when speakers create such expressions they do so in a fairly consistent way (Calbris; 1990; McNeill, 1992). It is not difficult to imagine how, within a homogeneous culture, such consistencies could become socially shared. For some kinds of commonly repeated expressions, they could become conventionalized to the point that they are recognizable and so ‘emerge’ as emblems or quotable gestures.

What kinds of gestural expressions are likely to be repeated commonly enough so that they might undergo such a process of conventionalization? We might expect that this would happen more often with pragmatic rather than substantive gesturing. Since gesture can be deployed and sustained during speech, it is available as a useful medium in which the intentional frame of an utterance can be presented. In addition, since the number of different types of interactional moves or types of discourse units is limited, a vocabulary of gestures marking these can be more readily established. Gesture used for substantive expression, in contrast, may be expected to be much more a matter of individual invention. The referential content of the gestures is potentially unlimited and what of this a speaker may choose to represent gesturally is highly variable. Thus it is perhaps not surprising that the most widespread of the stylized gestures we have observed are pragmatic rather than substantive.

The process proposed here for the ‘emergence’ of quotable gestures or emblems through a process of conventionalization of spontaneously created metaphorical gestures cannot explain the origin of all such gestures, of course. Many have arisen in the first instance as a gesture fashioned to depict a symbolic object or as the enactment of a symbolic action in a ritual context (see Morris et al., 1979, for a discussion of the origins of many such gestures). The Mani giunte, for instance, may well have arisen as a borrowing into conversational use of the ‘praying hands’ gesture of Christian prayer, which became established in this context in about the 11th century (Schmitt, 1990: 269ff.). It could have entered conversational use before this, since prior to the 11th century the gesture was known as that used by a vassal when ritually offering homage to his lord. The relationship between both these ritual uses as well as the relationship between them and its use in everyday conversation, certainly common in Naples in 1832 (as De Jorio testifies), is a matter of conjecture. However, it seems reasonable to suppose that the conversational use of the gesture derives from its religious use, insofar as such religious use would have been common to almost everyone and the boundary between conduct in religious contexts and everyday contexts was not sharply defined in medieval times. If this is so, then we have an example of a derivational process that is more or less the reverse of the derivational process we have proposed for the Mano a borsa and ‘OK’ gestures.

Whether or not our suggestion about the origin of the Mani giunte is correct, there is good reason to suppose that it is a gesture that has been in use for a very long time.
The other gestures we have discussed may also be quite ancient. Thus, with regard to the Mano a borsa, De Jorio (ibid.: 86) refers to an illustration in the Ninth Century illuminated manuscript of the plays of the Roman playwright Terence, in which the Mano a borsa is depicted in a character who is asking a question. As for the Ring, the following passage from the Spanish Roman writer on rhetoric, Marcus Fabius Quintillianus of the First Century A.D. (1922), has sometimes been cited as evidence for an ancient use, similar to the one we describe here: "If the first finger touches the middle of the right hand edge of the thumb-nail with its extremity, the other fingers being relaxed, we shall have a graceful gesture well suited to express approval or to accompany statements of fact, and to mark the distinction between our different points" (XI, III: 101–102). Its use as a way of commenting on the speech or actions of others, and so its emergence as a quotable gesture may be more recent.

I will conclude this paper with a more general theoretical comment. In his study of gesture in narrative discourse McNeill (1992) shows that gestures may be employed differentially to mark the different discourse functions of units of talk within a narration. For example, gesture may indicate that a given unit of talk is serving as background to a narrative event, as a comment on the narrative as a whole, or that it is devoted to the narrative itself. Since, as is clear from the analysis of how gesture and speech are organized in relation to one another, gestures must be seen as an integral component of any utterance in which they are found (cf. Kendon, 1972, 1980, 1993; McNeill, 1992), but since they may also give expression to the discourse role of an utterance as well as to its content, this means that discourse role is an integral part of the utterance. As McNeill (1992: 183–184) says: "Even though the linguistic code does not enable the speaker to express these [discourse] references in words, the gesture channel does express them. A speaker creates his own context through discourse but he also includes in each utterance a reference to the discourse, and this reference may be at the forefront". Elsewhere McNeill adds that the differential expression of the discourse functions of utterances in gesture shows that "the speaker foresees in detail the discourse role of the utterance-to-come from the earliest stages of its evolution. In this sense, discourse information is part of the core of the utterance without which the utterance could not come into being" (ibid.: 217).

The observations we have reported here allow one to go a step further. It is not only the role of a given unit of speech within a larger discourse structure that is part of the 'core of the utterance'. The role of a given unit of speech within the interpersonal context is also part of this utterance core. As we have shown, speakers may use gestures which can explicitly mark a given stretch of speech as being a particular type of speech act. Within a discourse, they can differentiate gesturally topic from comment, or indicate what units are 'focal' for their arguments. We have referred to this gesturing as 'pragmatic'. Perhaps it would be better to refer to it as 'rhetorical' since these gestures seem to indicate the part an utterance plays, or the part a component of it plays, as a move within an interactional situation. Thus we may add that the rhetorical purpose of an utterance is also foreseen in detail by the speaker and is also part of the utterance’s 'core'.

More generally, we believe, this strengthens a point of view we have expressed elsewhere (Kendon, 1985, 1994) that gesture should be looked upon, along with speech, as an expressive resource available to the speaker and which, like speech, may be deployed differently according to the speaker’s communicative aim. It does not emerge, symptom-like, as a sort of ‘spillover’ from the effort of verbal articulation (Rimé, 1983, has offered a view somewhat along these lines), nor does it only emerge as a kind of imaging device which assists the speaker to find a lexical item that he needs (cf. Freedman, 1977; Butterworth and Beattie, 1978; Morrel-Samuels and Krauss, 1992). Rather it serves, conjointly with speech, as part of the very construction of the utterance. Producers of utterances employ gesture, as they employ speech, to produce different communicative effects.

In the material we have considered here, in most of the examples the speakers are engaged in trying to persuade another that something is correct, or the speaker is trying to alter another’s view of how some event should be interpreted. Only one or two examples have been taken from narratives, and these narratives are not being told as entertainment, but as illustrations in support of an argument. Accordingly, we find gesture being mobilized to give expression to the rhetorical purposes of the utterances, that we find stylized, socially shared forms in use here would seem only to add further strength to our view. The conversationalists studied here have available to them a repertoire of gestural forms, just as they have lexical and syntactic forms (and intonational and other ‘paralinguistic’ forms as well), which can be mobilized in particular ways for particular expressive purposes. Thus the view is further reinforced that gestures are a part of language and that, together with lexico-syntactic linguistic constructions, they participate in the process of expression as it is finally shaped by the speaker.

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