What has COME become? A corpusbased study into its grammatical functions in Sign Language of the Netherlands

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A corpus-based study into its grammatical functions in NGT
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Introduction & Definitions
• The verb COME is multifunctional in Sign Language of the Netherlands (NGT). The lexical meaning is associated with a change of location. This study shows that the sign has gained some grammatical functions as well: it has become a Future Tense (FT) marker and a Change-of-State (CoS) marker.
• Grammaticalization is characterised by a loss of lexical meaning, lexical function and morphosyntactic properties, by gaining a grammatical function, and (often) by phonological reduction. A gram is a grammatical morpheme [4]. Previously documented examples of grammaticalization in sign languages are:
  - NGT verb GO.TO → auxiliary ACT.ON [1] and perhaps a FT marker GO [6] (see discussion);
  - ASL verb GO.TO → FT marker FUTURE [2]
• Although grammaticalization of ‘to come’ is quite frequent in spoken languages [3], it has, to my knowledge, not yet been described for a sign language. This is also the first description of a CoS marker in NGT.

Research questions
1. What are the grammaticalized functions of COME?
2. What is the sentence position of the gram COME?
3. What are the phonological forms of the gram COME?

Methodology
The Corpus NGT [5] was used to obtain data. We focused on the form in Figure 1, but other forms (with the same gloss) were studied as well. In total, 20% of the search hits (104/528 hits) was analyzed.

Results
1. COME has grammaticalized into a FT marker (ex. 1+2) and a CoS marker (ex. 3+4). Some examples are ambiguous (ex. 5+6).
2. The gram COME usually precedes the predicate (ex. 1-5), but sometimes it appears in sentence-final position (ex. 6). The lexical verb COME adheres to the basic word orders SVO&SOV.
3. The form as shown in Fig. 1 can appear one- or two-handed. No specific non-manual signals are associated, except for the mouthing kOm ‘come’. Other forms have a different handshape and have not gained these grammatical functions (but see discussion).

Examples
1. COME SPREAD [clip 723, S34]
   ‘It will spread.’
2. COME DEAF IX3.PL SELF LEARN DEAF TEACHER SELF IX3 [clip 97, S1]
   ‘It will be the case that the deaf will teach the deaf.’
3. FINALLY DRIVE.MOTOR COME RAIN [clip 319, S15]
   ‘I could finally drive my motor, but then it started to rain.’
4. IF (…) HEARING PARENTS IX1-3 COME PREGNANT DEAF (…) [clip 132, S8]
   ‘If hearing parents become pregnant with a deaf child…’
5. IX1 EXPECT COME IX3 INTENSE FAST.SIGNING INTENSE [clip 726, S34]
   ‘I expect they will become very fluent signers.’
6. IF CONTACT JUMP ELECTRICITY COME [clip 1839, S76]
   ‘If he contacts [the cables], he will be electrocuted.’

Discussion & Conclusion
• The grammaticalization of COME is for the first time described for a sign language. As is commonly the case, the notion will be described, not all characteristics apply: there is no phonological reduction, and the lexical meaning still exists.
• Generally, emergence of the FT marker follows the CoS marker [3]. It is unknown if this is the case for NGT, since the data are not suitable to test diachronic hypotheses.
• Interestingly, a related form (Fig. 2) has the function of an imperative marker [7]. This sign has followed another grammaticalization path.
• After re-analysis, the gram GO does not seem to function as an FT marker contra [6]. Therefore, the relationship between COME and GO was not further studied.

Figure 1. The NGT sign COME (one-handed)
Figure 2. The imperative gram COME


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