

# The semantics and pragmatics of gestured listing constructions in English

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The multimodal expression of enumeration has not received sustained attention in the gesture literature, possibly because variation is extensive in how speakers count on their fingers or gesture while listing steps in a process, a set of options, or multiple examples of a category—whether that category is conceptually congruent or ad hoc. The high degree of variation in the visuo-spatial signal is matched by a high degree of variation in the linguistic signal, vis-à-vis factors such as the length of the list, the lexico-syntactic “weight” of listed items, whether all items are relatively on-par with respect to their level of specificity, and whether the list ends with an all-purpose “general extender”, such as *and stuff like that* or *or whatever* (Overstreet & Yule 1997, 2021). Such variability in the speech signal may explain why listing expressions haven’t been considered as candidate constructions in the cognitive linguistic literature either. Moreover, lists serve different functions in discourse and we must also consider the pragmatics of the context of use (cf. Aijmer 2002, Romero-Trillo 2015) to determine whether the list serves a more referential (informational) or discursive (intersubjective) function and the ramifications this difference has for co-speech listing gestures. The ubiquity of variation observed for enumeration and listing has perhaps occluded the fact that both co-speech/co-sign activities are ripe for investigation as recurrent gesture types (Ladewig 2014, Müller 2017) or even as multimodal constructions (Zima & Bergs 2017).

Our presentation surveys research we’ve conducted that examines the incidence and nature of co-speech embodiments with a variety of listing constructions in English. Using the multimedia Red Hen video archive (Steen & Turner 2013; Joo, Steen, & Turner 2017), we have analyzed the role of list length, listed item complexity, item specificity, presence of pragmatic markers, and incidence of turn completions in the context of particular listing constructions. In the Conversation Analysis literature, prominence is given to the three-part list, since it allegedly signals turn-completion, invites the interlocutor to help finish the list, or even spurs the speaker to complete the list by inserting a general extender (cf. Jefferson 1990; Lerner 1994; Shiffrin 1994; Overstreet & Yule 1987, 2021; Hinnell & Rice 2020, 2022; Rice & Hinnell 2022). See (1) and Figure 1 for an example of two different kinds of three-part lists and note the difference in co-speech gesture across the underscored listed items. However, in our corpus of hundreds of video clips from Red Hen containing lists with general extenders, we have found that the majority of such lists feature only two items; that is, one “listed” item and a general extender. Moreover, the lists we examined function less to exemplify items or options, but rather serve as parenthetical asides that the speaker hurries through in order to return to his or her main topic. The stance profile of lists is also dictated by the specific general extender that completes them. Overall, our findings suggest that gestured lists in English tend to be short and vague and carry more pragmatic force than semantic content.

## Sample Data

(1) “Our Olympic athletes have come home to Canada! [applause]. That’s right. Some came home yesterday. Many more are coming home today. Airports across this great land to applause [X], and to hugs [Y], and to tears [Z], and to probably some weird touching [X] and some kissing [Y] and all that [GE], ... is good.”



Fig. 1. Screen shots from a video clip containing two three-part lists without (X-Y-Z) and with (X-Y-GE) a general extender. The still shot coincides with the stroke at each listed item [see underscored text in (1)]. Note the different hand shapes and orientations between the lists in the top and the bottom rows and across the specific (X, Y) and non-specific (GE) items in the second row.

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