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May the Force Be with You... Gesturality of the Barcelonians Associated with Mockery, Insult and Protection

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Abstract: The aim of the article is to inventory gestures related to mockery, insult, attracting good luck, or warding off bad luck that a group of informants from Barcelona have performed. The data come from the application of the survey from the *Atlas de Gestos*, whose task is to collect gestures from the Pan-Hispanic context to describe the gestural repertoire of each territory and conduct comparative studies. The results, interpreted based on social factors (gender, age, and level of instruction), confirm the wide range of gestures for different functions (10 for mockery, 11 for insult and attracting good luck, and 9 for warding off bad luck). Regarding differences based on social variables, the results allow for indicating trends, namely, while the most used gesture to express mockery is sticking out the tongue, young people prefer the gesture of pointing and laughing, and informants over 55 years old only prefer laughing. Concerning insults, the use of *peineta* is widespread, although differences in behavior between men and women are observed. As for attracting good luck, Barcelona informants opt for crossing fingers, although older generations use gestures with more religious connotations, such as clasping hands. Finally, to ward off bad luck, Barcelona locals mention the gesture of crossing made with the index fingers of each hand.

Keywords: non-verbal communication; gestures; gestural atlas; gestural variation; Spanish gestures

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1. Introduction

Amid the 21st century, certain events—such as a football match—serve as perfect ritualistic settings where a mix of religious feelings and superstitions emerge. Many footballers make the sign of the cross as they enter the field, but also at other moments during the match, such as when they score a goal or miss an excellent opportunity. Rather than making the sign of the cross, some athletes prefer to touch the grass on the pitch. Others perform the sign of the cross just as the referee blows the starting whistle. Moreover, there are those who, without tracing the cross with their hand, content themselves with picking up a bit of soil and kissing it or entering the field hopping on one leg. Thus, a foreign spectator at a Spanish league football match might conclude that the majority of Spanish citizens hold deep religious sentiments.

Similarly, the gesture of crossing fingers to form a cross is a protective gesture used to ward off curses and neutralize bad luck. It is currently used as a protective ritual, so much so that it serves as the basis for creating an emoji included in digital applications like WhatsApp (2.24.8.85).

In 2015, the late Rita Barberá, mayor of Valencia, was criticized for gestures she directed to those demonstrating in favor of an investigation into the subway accident that happened in Valencia on 3 June 2006, which left 43 dead and 47 injured, with no political accountability. Specifically, the mayor put her right thumb to her nose, moving the other fingers back and forth. Quickly, the newspapers echoed the event with headlines such as: "Rita Barberá se burla de un grupo que critica la corrupción de Valencia" ('Rita Barberá mocks group criticising corruption in Valencia') (El País 2015, 3 April); "Sí, Rita Barberá

se burló de las víctimas del metro" ('Yes, Rita Barberá made fun of the metro victims') (El Diario 2015, 3 April).

Considering the frequency of mocking and superstitious gestures in everyday communication, the objective of this article is to compile an inventory of gestures of mockery, insult, and protection used by people from Barcelona, based on data from questionnaires completed for the project *Atlas de gestos* (hereinafter referred to as AdG), coordinated by Dr. Ana M.ª Cestero (University of Alcalá) (Cestero et al. 2022).

The AdG gathers responses from a questionnaire, including an audiovisual recording component, completed by a group of informants chosen based on their social profile. Following this methodology, the aim is, on the one hand, to inventory the aforementioned gestures and, on the other hand, to describe them considering factors such as gender, age, and the educational level of the informants. In this way, the relevant sociolinguistic variation of the non-verbal signs mentioned will be documented, if any.

For this research, we analyze the gestural behaviors of a sample of Barcelona residents stratified by quotas. Specifically, the stratification is based on three variables: gender, age, and educational level.

Based on the data from the questionnaires, this paper answers the following two research questions:

1. What gestures do Barcelonians use to express mockery, insult, and invoke good luck and protection?
2. Are there differences in the use of gestures expressing mockery, insult, and luck motivated by the social characteristics of the informants?

2. Non-Verbal Communication

Human gestures have a common neuronal and physiological basis, yet their manifestations differ, influenced by environmental and cultural factors (Payrató 2013). Within this distinctive and almost idiosyncratic materialization, we consciously or unconsciously provide information related to our age, mood, and, as David Efron (1941) noted, our belonging to a culture.

Each culture has cultivated its own set of gestures—referred to as emblems—many of which carry strong symbolic meanings, representing the specific cultural values of that human group. Beyond their communicative and expressive roles, emblems primarily serve to express our identity.[1]

This article aims to inventory, on one hand, emblematic gestures expressing mockery and insult, and on the other hand, those used to attract good luck or ward off ill omens. The objective is to describe these gestures and identify the most common ones—those learned by the surveyed individuals in Barcelona for this article—supplementing the explanations with the three mentioned social factors.

2.1. Mockery Gestures and Insult Gestures

According to the *Diccionario de la Lengua Española* (hereinafter, DLE n.d), *burla* is defined as the "acción, ademán o palabras con que se procura poner en ridículo a alguien o a algo" ('action, gesture or words intended to make a fool of someone or something') (see *burla*). Insult, however, refers to offending someone by provoking or irritating them with words or actions (see *insultar*). In general, the main difference between mockery and insult lies in the intention and tone used with one and the other.

Mockery is typically a lighter form of teasing or fun, often with a playful or humorous tone. It may involve making sarcastic or ironic comments but generally is not intended to deeply hurt or discredit the interlocutor's image. Mockery can be well-received among close friends or in informal situations, as long as it does not cross sensitive boundaries or is used to harm someone.

In contrast, the intent of a person who insults is to harm, discredit, or humiliate their interlocutor. Insults carry a stronger negative connotation, and their intention is clearly

hostile. Additionally, insults are often more direct, aggressive, and offensive to the recipient. They are frequently used with the aim of causing emotional pain or creating conflict.

According to linguistic pragmatics, mockery and especially insults are impolite speech acts, deliberately violating the rules of cooperation (Grice 1975) and the maxim of politeness (Leech 1983) that govern human communication. They have often been described as complex and variable phenomena in which not only linguistic aspects but also social and cognitive factors play a role in their production and reception (Rodríguez-Noriega 2020). In reality, many lexical units do not inherently constitute an insult but are perceived as such when used with a specific purpose in a given cultural and communicative context.

A detailed investigation of verbal and non-verbal mockery and insult involves considering the participants in the interaction, the sender's intention, the receiver's perception, the cultural specifics of the society in which the interactive process takes place, and, finally, an inventory of linguistic and non-verbal units used with the communicative intention of mocking or insulting.

As a starting point for this work, below is a list of Spanish gestures used to mock or insult someone documented in the work *Hablar en español sin palabras. Diccionario audiovisual de gestos españoles* (hereinafter, DAGE) (Cestero et al. 2020).[2] Succinctly, the DAGE is an updated inventory of common basic gestures used in Spain, presented in an audiovisual format.[3] It comprises 156 entries and 278 dialogues represented in videos: the former is divided into 8 major sections, corresponding to a catalog of communicative functions derived from *Plan Curricular del Instituto Cervantes* (Instituto Cervantes 2006).

Before continuing, it is worth noting that general Spanish gestural repertoires often omit insults and obscene or offensive gestures for various reasons, often related to taboos. Thus, of the 156 entries in the DAGE, only 7 correspond to non-verbal behaviors associated with insults and only 1 is dedicated to mockery. This "scarcity" of documentation in gesture dictionaries for insults or mockery[4] contrasts with the potentially infinite inventory of linguistic insults used with the intention of offending someone, stemming from speakers' imagination, trends, the influence of other languages, or the geographic context (Duñabeitia and Méndez 2020). Exhaustive lexicographic works have listed them: for instance, Celdrán (2008) compiles over 10,000 Spanish insults with interesting indications about their origin, geographical location, or documentation in literary works. There have also been organized research projects whose promoters have attempted to identify the most commonly used insults by Spaniards.[5]

In the DAGE, gestures of mockery and insult are found in the section dedicated to the communicative macro-function of expressing opinions, attitudes, and knowledge, specifically under the heading "Bad-mouthing or making fun of someone". Table 1 includes the verbal description of the gestures corresponding to the seven non-verbal signs with semantic content associated with insult and mockery documented in the DAGE.

Table 1. Gestures linked to insult and mockery documented in the DAGE.

Macro-Function	Communicative Function/Semantic Content	Verbal Description of Gesture (DAGE)
Expressing opinions, attitudes, and knowledge Bad-mouthing or making fun of someone (insult)	*Cerrado/a de mente* ('narrow-minded')	1. The palms of both hands are placed near the ears, reproducing the shape of a horse's earflaps 2. The knuckle of the index finger is tapped on the right temple
	Tozudo/a ('stubborn')	1. One hits with the fist on a surface, the head, and even, gently, the head of the person we are referring to
	Cornudo/a ('cuckold')	1. A clenched fist is raised, with both the index and little finger stretched out
	Descarado/a ('shameless')	1. The cheek is struck with the back of the hand, once or several times
	Loco/a ('crazy')	1. The index finger is placed against the temple and a rotating motion is made with it 2 The index finger is placed against the temple and it is tapped
	Prepotente ('overbearing')	1. Simulating lifting a jacket lapel with both hands
	Tacaño/a ('stingy')	1. The arm is raised with a tightly clenched fist

Table 1. *Cont.*

Macro-Function	Communicative Function/Semantic Content	Verbal Description of Gesture (DAGE)
Expressing opinions, attitudes, and knowledge Bad-mouthing or making fun of someone (mockery)	*Sacar la lengua* ('Sticking out the tongue')	1. Sticking the tongue out

None of the items included in the DAGE correspond to the three most commonly used linguistic units as insults in Spain, as outlined in Duñabeitia and Méndez (2020), namely, *gilipollas* ('jerk'), *imbécil* ('idiot'), and *cabrón* ('asshole'). However, the seven units collected correspond to rude contents whose illocutionary force is perceived by the interlocutor as aggressive.

The consulted bibliography also highlights the controversy in determining which gestural behavior should be considered an insulting or mocking gesture, offensive, or obscene. For example, in the DAGE, only the gesture of sticking out the tongue is documented as an index of mockery. However, the work itself explains that when performed among adults, it does not imply offensive mockery but rather a teasing mockery. It is also mentioned that the mocking attitude becomes more insulting if the gesture of sticking out the tongue is accompanied by placing the thumbs on the temples or ears with open hands, moving them back and forth, mimicking the movement of a donkey's ears. In terms of usage, both variants are considered in the DAGE as limited to the realm of childhood. It is explained that, when adults use these gestures, it is to annoy or play with children. Thus, as previously indicated, the use of mockery and insult gestures is clearly conditioned by the intentionality of the sender and the receiver of the message.

Returning to the insult gestures documented in the DAGE, as seen in Table 1, these are used to allude to some "defect" in the personality of the insulted person (*cerrado/a de mente*, *tozudo/a*, *descarado/a*, *prepotente*, *tacaño/a*), intellectual capacity (*loco/a*), or the intent to humiliate the interlocutor (*cornudo/a*).

Finally, Baró (2013) published a dictionary that is particularly interesting for this article as it includes over 70 gestures used for insulting or mocking in Spain and other parts of the world.

2.2. Protective Gestures (Attracting Good Luck; Warding Off Bad Luck)

Superstitions have held a significant place in the lives of civilizations since the dawn of humanity. Quantifying what percentage of the population in Spain identifies as superstitious is complex. In fact, superstitions are difficult to quantify since some individuals may exhibit superstitious behaviors in certain aspects of their lives without being able to identify or acknowledge them as such. In the absence of scientifically proven data, media outlets periodically publish articles with unverified figures. For instance, in the feature "Las supersticiones más famosas de España", published in Diario de Sevilla (2021) on 27 November, it was noted that up to 60% of Spaniards admit to having some kind of quirk or superstition, but there is no mention of the source for this figure.

The triumph of the scientific method led to an increasing disregard for superstitions, deemed practices belonging to people without knowledge. On the other hand, the definition provided by Pierre le Brun in the 17th century in his *Critical History of Practical Superstitions* clearly places superstition outside the sphere of religion:

> Superstition is what disrupts or causes disorder in the worship due to God, and what causes this disorder is everything that does not refer to God, because the knowledge we have of God, explained in the first commandment, shows us that worship is due to God alone, always and in all things. What does not refer to God is reprehensible worship, worship that is not ordered, which is called, in a word, superstition; that is, excessive worship, disorderly worship.

The characterization provided by the DLE combines the two ideas just mentioned: superstition is a belief that is foreign to religious faith and contrary to reason. Nevertheless, superstitions continue to exist, and the mental processes experienced by individuals holding superstitions have not yet been rigorously discussed, nor has the analysis of the role they play in a particular society been deeply explored (Ortiz 2009).

Some traditional treatises such as the work *Supersticiones españolas*, written by Sánchez (1948), reveal that historically, many of the superstitious rituals practiced in Spain revolved around three main aspects: avoiding death, warding off poverty, and repelling loneliness. In other words, these practices pursued the well-known triad of health, wealth, and love. Within the realm of Spanish superstitions, another subjective yet universal concept prominently stands out: luck.

Superstitious beliefs associated with luck manifest daily in various situations: from the student who wears the same shirt every exam day throughout their university career to the person who avoids walking under a ladder, even if it means taking a significant detour. In 21st-century Spain, fully immersed in the technological world, people still circulate and forward alleged chains of luck through messaging systems like WhatsApp: "Send this message to 20 other people. If you don't, a great misfortune will fall upon you", digitally emulating those handwritten letters of yesteryears.

Superstitious gestures have origins that we fail to fully comprehend: typically, they stem from a coincidence between one of these gestures and the occurrence of a happy or tragic event, arbitrarily deducing a cause-and-effect relationship. Subsequently, the gesture itself becomes associated with the triggering of the event and, ultimately, the event itself, transforming into the ritualization of it. Alongside individual superstition, societies hold their particular repertoire of superstitions, adhering to them out of habit with a tenaciousness that proves difficult to break free from. Tossing a few pinches of salt (often three) over the left shoulder after spilling the salt shaker or touching wood to ward off misfortune are widespread warding gestures that remain impersonal in the sense that they are not directed toward anyone in particular but toward any deity or supernatural force whose name or nature we may not even know (Kostolany 1977).

The sacred gesture is connected to religion, namely, to the endeavor of explaining phenomena such as creation, the order of the world, and the place that the human being occupies within that entire cosmogony. Likewise, the sacred gesture emerges in the specific celebrations of each society, constituting its rites, i.e., the set of ceremonies aiming to foster communication between human beings and divinity. It differs from the gesture of superstition: the sacred gesture implies a dialogue, an exchange with a superior being to which humans address themselves, seeking protection. On the other hand, the superstitious gesture does not involve communication with any specific or known entity, although it also occurs in search of shelter. In both cases, the individual acts propelled by a sort of faith.

In the DAGE, protective gestures are also listed in the section dedicated to the communicative macro-function for expressing opinions, attitudes, and knowledge, specifically in the subsection "Show beliefs or superstitions". Table 2 provides the verbal description of the gestures corresponding to semantic contents related to beliefs and superstitions featured in the DAGE.

Table 2. Gestures associated with protection and luck in the DAGE.

Macro-Function	Communicative Function/Semantic Content	Verbal Description of Gesture (DAGE)
Expressing opinions, attitudes, and knowledge Show beliefs or superstitions	Warding off bad luck or a bad spell	1. The fingers of one or both hands are crossed, placing the middle finger on the index finger 2. The hand is raised, with the fist closed and the index and little fingers extended forward, or several touches are made on the temple with them 3. Know on wood

3. Methodology

As mentioned in the introductory section, the aim of this article is to draw up an inventory of gestures of mockery, insult, and protection used by a group of informants from Barcelona. We have already presented the catalog of gestures for the expression of these semantic contents contained in the DAGE, which is taken as the starting point for this work. However, the material that forms the basis of this article comes from the survey of Barcelona informants of the AdG. The main objective of the AdG is to elaborate a digital atlas of gestures that covers, on the one hand, the entire geography of Spanish and, on the other hand, the different cultures of the world. It is an ambitious and very complex project that will require the participation of research teams from different Spanish-speaking communities, areas, or countries, and is conceived as the exhibition of the results of a coordinated research process. The phases of material collection and insertion of general data are carried out through applications created for this purpose in the atlas portal. Cestero (2023) provides exhaustive details of the work approach, the objectives it pursues, and the methodology to be followed in the collection of data from all the research teams that participate in its elaboration.

Specifically, the survey used allows the collection of data from two dimensions: on the one hand, that which goes "from the communicative function to the form of production", with the objective of documenting the basic gestures of each speech community through the realization carried out by the informants, based on the communicative contribution specified to them. In the specific case at hand, they were asked, for example, "How do you express mockery without using words with a gesture?" or "How do you insult without using words?". On the other hand, the survey contemplates a section to analyze the dimension that goes "from the form of production to the communicative function", with which information on the recognition or non-recognition of a set of gestures is collected.

The survey, as mentioned above, is made up of several sections:

- In the first, the project is presented.
- In the second, after assigning a code to the participant, data are collected on the participant and the researcher.
- In the third, the gestures performed by the respondent for each function (8 macro-functions,[6] divided into 75 entries) are collected by recording videos.
- In the fourth, 34 images are shown to collect the functions from the gestures.

It is important to note that, before beginning the interview, the informant must give their consent to allow the researchers to use the information provided and the images collected in the recordings. The application also allows the informed consent form to be stored, completed, and signed.

Given that the informants were selected considering a series of social variables, the description of the gestures included in the results section of this article is complemented with a sociolinguistic perspective. For this purpose, we start from a balanced sample stratified on the basis of three variables: gender (M: male or F: female), age (1: 20 to 34 years old, 2: 35 to 54 years old, 3: 55 years old or older), and education level (EL1: without or with primary education—approximately 5 to 9 years of compulsory schooling, EL2: with secondary education—approximately 10 to 14 years of schooling, and EL3: with higher education—approximately 15 years of schooling). In addition to these social variables, the participants were selected based on two other fundamental characteristics: firstly, they had to have been born in the metropolitan area of Barcelona (AMB); that is, in one of the 36 municipalities bordering the capital; and secondly, if they were born elsewhere, they should have arrived before the age of 10 or have been living in the AMB for a minimum of 20 years.

The project has envisaged that the samples contributing data to the AdG from each area, as well as the studies organized by zones or cultures that can be developed from them, will have a minimum of 18 informants, one per social profile established based on the variables of gender, age, and education level. However, it is suggested that, where possible,

the sample should be expanded to obtain more robust results, proportionally increasing the number of participants beyond the minimum of 18 informants and up to 36 or 54 people.

On this occasion, the sample consists of 36 informants, distributed to the characteristics shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of the sample of informants.

Variable		N = 36
Gender	Male	18
	Female	18
Age	From 20 to 34	12
	From 35 to 54	12
	+55	12
Education Level	EL1	12
	EL2	12
	EL3	12

In the following section, the most frequently used gestures by the sample of informants from Barcelona to express mockery, insult, attract good luck, and ward off bad omens are listed.

4. Results

In this section, we analyze the gestures that Barcelonians reported using to express mockery, insult, and protection. Specifically, each function is examined in order, on the one hand, to inventory the different gestures produced and their variants, and, on the other hand, to answer the research questions related to the possible existence of gestural variation derived from the social variables of sex, age, and level of instruction.

4.1. Gestures of Mockery

From the question "How do you express gestures of mockery without using words?", a total of 10 different gestures have been documented, some with variations. It is important to note that out of the total 36 informants, 3 individuals mentioned they did not use this gesture; they explicitly mentioned they refrained from doing so because they did not mock people. For instance, informant No. 12, a woman from the first age group and with secondary education, stated: "Burlarse es ofensivo, así que no lo hago porque es una falta de respeto" ('Mocking is offensive, so I don't do it because it's disrespectful'). In response to the question "When you use this gesture, does it have any special connotation?", five informants indicated that they directed it towards a child, that is to say, when they were speaking with children.

The AdG questionnaire, following the explicit question about the used gesture, enquires about the verbal expression typically accompanying the gesture and finally asks the informant if they know of any other gestures of mockery. Regarding this last question, it is worth noting that 13 individuals mentioned using more than one gesture for mockery.

In order to facilitate the comprehension of the gestures and the figures, we have created a table (see Appendix A) that includes the following information: number of gestures, illustrative picture, linguistic description, and tag to identify each gesture in each figure. We list the mocking gestures below from most to least frequent:

1. Sticking out the tongue. The gesture is directed towards the person being mocked. Documented variants of this gesture include versions where the tongue is out with the mouth clearly open (more overt expression) and, on other occasions, the tongue is out with the mouth closed.[7]

2. Pointing to the person being mocked, with the arm stretched out and the index finger in the direction of the person and laughing. Some variants of the gesture have been documented: some informants laugh and cover their mouths, hiding the mockery.
3. To bring the thumb of the hand to the nose while shaking the other extended fingers. A common variant involves using both hands, joining the thumb of the second hand with the pinky of the first (a brief explanation of the origin of this gesture follows).[8]
4. Laugh directly at the interlocutor.[9]
5. Place the thumbs on each temple and move the fingers back and forth. Additionally, as a variant of this gesture, some informants complement it by sticking out their tongues.
6. Rest the index finger on the temple and make a rotating motion. It is a gesture reminiscent of the insult *loco/a*.
7. Raise the arm energetically backward, over the head, in the same motion used to say "anda ya" ('Come on!').
8. Using the palm of the hand stretched out, repeatedly strike the stomach, mimicking the action of splitting the body in two: *partirse la caja* ('cracking up laughing'). This gesture also has a variation performed with a closed fist.
9. Slowly clapping.
10. Moving the hand at face level while saying *telita* ('oh my god').[10]

In the 19th century, in 1832 in concrete, Andrea de Jorio's wrote *La mimica degli antichi investigata nel gestire napoletano*, the first ethnographic work dealing with gestures in Naples and classical antiquity. In it, the author points out that mocking gestures often ridicule the defects of the body (and those of the spirit) (de Jorio [1832] 2000, p. 113). Although it compiles 11 different gestures, we only point out the ones that coincide with those produced by the Barcelonians:

1. Hands in the air making continuous and irregular movements: this gesture was used to ridicule either physical defects or a defect in someone's motivation.
2. Tongue extended outside the mouth. In de Jorio's words, "Perhaps because imbeciles tend to have an open mouth with the tongue stuck out a little" (p. 114).
3. With the tip of the thumb touching the tip of the nose, the open hand is moved back and forth: "indicates a dullard, someone who is coarse or vulgar. Among us, however, more usually it denotes someone who was, is, or will be deluded in his hopes. That is to say, a fool or what, in French, precisely, is known as *Dupe*" (p. 115).
4. The hand held edgewise with all the fingers open with the thumb directed toward the nose.
5. With the hand held edgewise and the fingers open, the tip of the thumb is merely brought close to the nose.
6. Both hands open, one after the other, oscillating.

For his part, Lluís Payrató, in his work *El gest nostre de cada dia* (2013), states that some functions of these gestures are purely playful, involving complicity without malice or offense. These gestures manifest a sense of solidarity or intimacy between the one mocking and the one being mocked, particularly within a familiar context. As this author also points out, many informants performed the gesture with a cheerful facial expression, which helps mitigate the 'consented mockery among adults or from adults to children' (Payrató 2013, p. 48). However, distinguishing the level of complicity or malice can be complex, and it will be the communicative context that reveals the degree of attenuation.

There are several aspects worth mentioning about this list. As Payrató (2013) suggests, there is a set of gestures inherited culturally, which have been preserved and transmitted across generations. Sticking out the tongue as a sign of mockery dates back, at the very least, to Greco-Roman antiquity. In reality, Latin literature presents two anecdotes related to the act of sticking out the tongue, both featuring Gauls, which is why some researchers attribute this origin to the gesture (Fornés and Puig 2008). This emblem is associated with a specific contextual situation: it is, in a sense, harmless and is often used with child receptors (Payrató 2013).

Once again, we turn to de Jorio's work to learn more about this gesture. According to the author, the origin of this gesture, known even in Prussia and other more northern regions of Europe, could be justified as follows: when someone discovers that they have been tricked, they tilt their head forward and open their mouth and eyes, as if to verify what happened. Thus, it seems that the nose has lengthened, as it is now the most prominent part of the face. The author even links it to the Italian expressions *nasolungo* ('long nose') and *restare con un palmo di naso* ('to remain with a palm of nose'), which refer to the feeling that remains when being mocked or not getting what was expected. Certainly, it would be extremely interesting to delve into the journey this gesture and its linguistic expressions have taken, especially considering its presence in Catalan: *quedar-se amb un pam de nas*.

Furthermore, this gesture (Figure 1, known colloquially in Catalonia as *fer pam i pipa*) seems to also be a Catalan gesture. While it does not have a specific name in Spanish, it is documented in Argentina and Uruguay as *el pito catalán* ('the nose thumb'). Payrató states that it might be considered an exportation from Catalan to Spanish (Payrató 2013, pp. 50–52). In Baró's (2013) work, this gesture is documented under the title *tururú*, one of the linguistic expressions that can accompany this non-verbal sign, and it is noted to be used in Spain, Argentina, the United Kingdom, and North America.

Figure 1. *Pito catalán* or *pam i pipa.* Source: Illustration by Vilhelm Pedersen.

According to Alfred Delvau (*apud* Payrató 2013), children in the city of Pompeii were already familiar with this gesture. We add this clarification because, as mentioned, several informants who referred to this gesture stated that they used it in a childhood context: 'with my nephew to make him laugh' [informant 34], 'I used it when I was a child' [informant 62]. In Catalonia, when children make this gesture, they usually accompany it with a verbal phrase in a teasing tone: *elis elis, putxinelis*... One of the Barcelona informants mentioned the verbal expression *tararí que te vi*.

To conclude this gesture, we want to point out the interesting results that could be provided by an analysis line from a language contact perspective based on a broader study replicated in Catalan and Spanish; however, it is not the purpose of this article to delve into these issues.

As for gesture 5, the back-and-forth movement of the fingers simulates the movement of large ears, like the ears of a donkey, an animal that symbolizes the lack of intelligence. This is a gesture that was already documented in Roman times with the value of mockery since in ancient Greece and Rome the donkey was considered to have defects such as stupidity, laziness, and obstinacy (Fornés and Puig 2005).

In summary, as can be seen in Figure 2, of the total of 54 realizations, the first gesture available for the set of informants analyzed is that of sticking out the tongue; secondly, pointing to the person being mocked and laughing and, thirdly, the gesture corresponding to "fer pam i pipa".

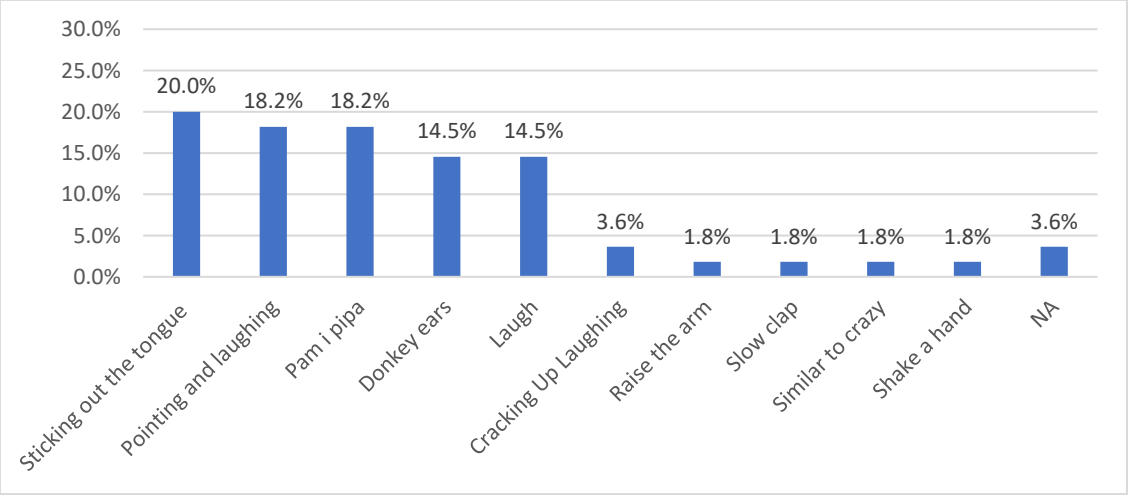

Figure 2. Total distribution of gestures expressing mockery.[11]

Analysis of Mocking Gestures Based on Social Variables

Below, descriptive data regarding mocking gestures are provided based on social variables. Firstly, we might ask who produces more gestures. According to the gender variable, men have offered a slightly higher number of units. Specifically, out of the 54 gesture instances, men provided 28 while women offered 26.

As seen in Figure 3, there are some differences in the use of certain gestures between men and women: men use the 'pam i pipa' gesture more frequently, while women tend to employ the act of sticking out the tongue and placing thumbs on their temples while moving their fingers in a waving motion. On the other hand, some gestures like cracking up laughing or slow clapping—used by the sender to mock someone's achievement—and the 'loco/a' gesture have been exclusively reported by some of the male interviewees.

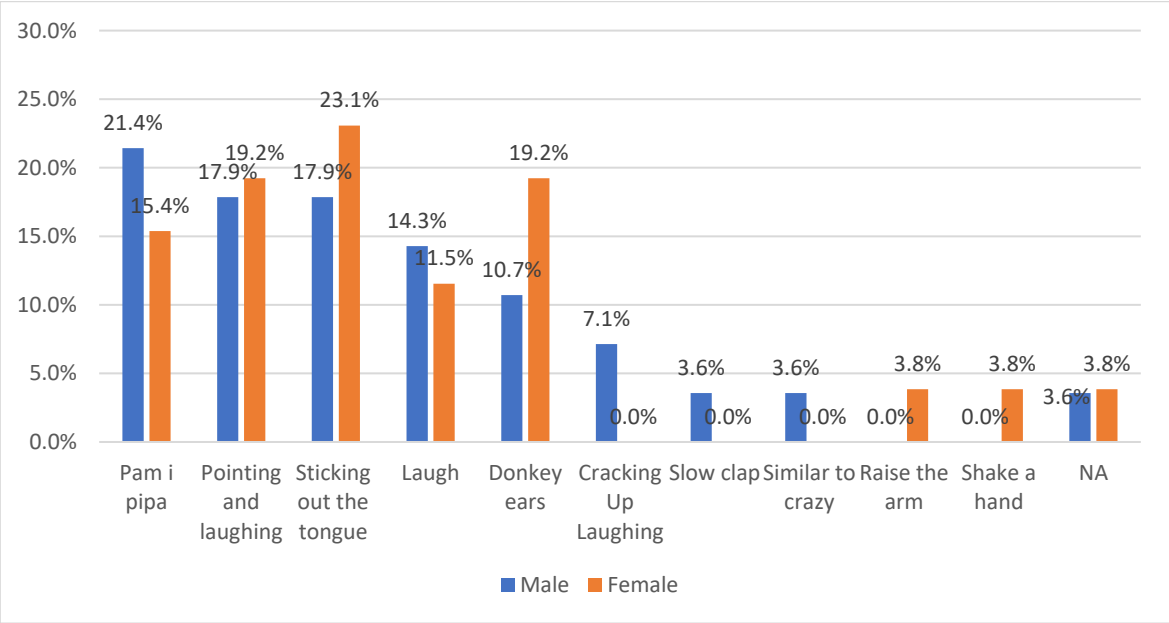

Figure 3. Distribution of mocking gestures according to gender.

Figure 4 displays the distribution of mocking gestures among the interviewed Barcelonians categorized by the age groups considered in this study.

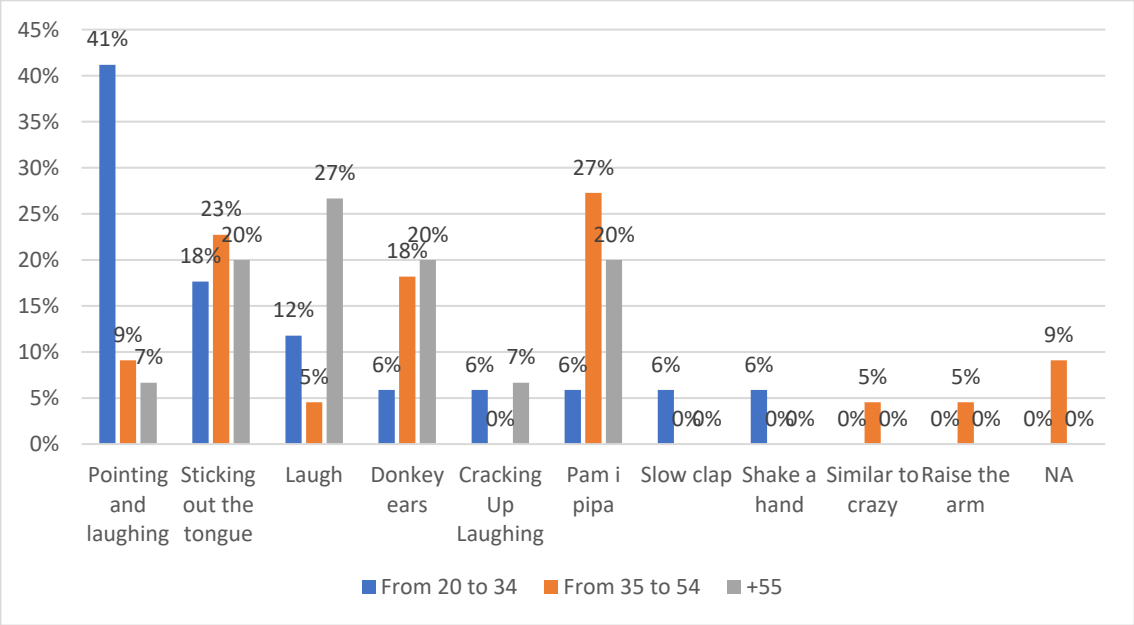

Figure 4. Distribution of mocking gestures according to age.

As observed, some mocking gestures have an argotic nature, meaning they are characteristic of a specific generation, in this case, the younger one. We are referring to gestures like cracking up laughing and the slow clap, which are only performed by individuals from the first age group in Barcelona. In fact, Baró (2013) mentions that the first of these gestures is of recent creation, highly popular among the youth in Spain, and not very well-known among older individuals.

Additionally, the act of pointing at the person being mocked and laughing also seems distinctly youthful. Conversely, individuals over 55 simply laugh without pointing.

Finally, with regard to the level of instruction variable, the distribution is shown in Figure 5.

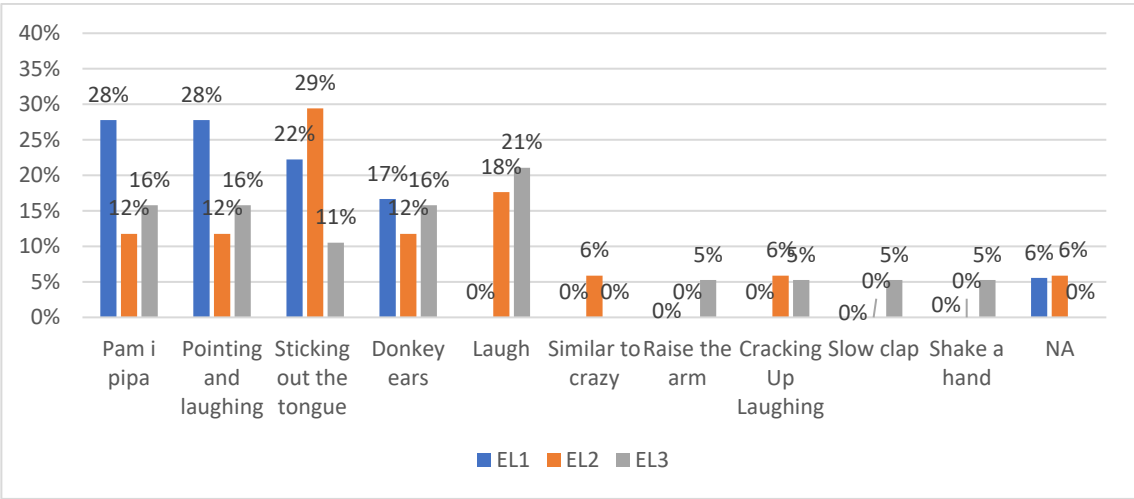

Figure 5. Distribution of mocking gestures according to level of instruction.

As depicted above, the data seem to show a wider range of gestures by people with a university education compared to people with a primary education, whose responses are concentrated in the gestures of sticking out their tongue, pointing and laughing, "pam i pipa", and placing their thumbs on their temples to emulate the shape of donkey's ears.

4.2. Gestures of Insult

After systematizing the responses to the question "How do you insult without using words, with a gesture?", out of 48 samples, 11 different gestures were inventoried. They are listed below, ordered by frequency of use:

1. Raising the middle finger while the rest of the fingers are tucked in. This gesture is known as *peineta* ('middle finger').[12] In the surveyed group of Barcelona informants, this gesture is documented with two variants: performing the gesture with one hand or with two hands. For this second option, some informants mention the intention to intensify the insult, which is why they use both hands to do so.
2. Raise a bent arm while striking it at the inside of the elbow with the opposite hand (*corte de manga*; 'V-sign').
3. Rest the index finger on the temple and make a rotating movement with it. This is the gesture that is usually used to evoke the insult *loco/a*. This gesture registers different variations: as mentioned above, a rotating movement can be made with the finger resting on the temple; the finger can simply remain resting on the temple without movement; slight blows can be made with the finger on the temple.
4. Raise the arm energetically backward, above the head, with a threatening motion as if the gesture sender were about to strike the receptor.
5. Combine the *peineta* and the *corte de manga*.
6. Press all the fingers of one hand together and touch the forehead. Then, separate the hand from the forehead while keeping the fingers together.
7. Raise the index and middle fingers of one hand and place them in a V-shape (symbolizing, once again, donkey ears) behind the head of the person being insulted, without them noticing the gesture. This gesture is commonly performed when taking a photo to ridicule the person being targeted.
8. To blow a kiss in a sarcastic manner.
9. Showing anger with the look, without an emblem or gesture.
10. Extend the index and middle fingers over the forehead and tap on it, indicating that the insulted person lacks two fingers on their forehead, meaning they are not very smart or have not acted intelligently at a particular moment.
11. Clenched fist, the thumb moves laterally at neck level.

The DAGE does not include gestures like *peineta* or *corte de manga*, which require a direct recipient and, as observed, appear in the questionnaire results with very relevant usage percentages. In fact, the *peineta* gesture is, as shown in Figure 6, the most used among the Barcelonians interviewed. Like in the mocking gestures, some respondents explicitly stated that they did not use these gestures; specifically, four individuals (two men and two women), with two of them being over 55 years old.

The *peineta* or gesture of raising the middle finger is extensively documented in Latin literary texts, making it an ancient gesture. On some occasions, the *peineta* is referred to as the 'indecent finger'. Indeed, it seems undisputed that in ancient Roman times, the raised finger alluded to the male sexual organ and, consequently, was an obscene nonverbal behavior. The mockery or insult conveyed by the gesture lies in labeling the person to whom it is directed as a passive sodomite (Fornés and Puig 2005). Often, the gestural insult accompanies the verbal insult: the gesture reinforces the word, or the word accompanies the gesture. In the case at hand, the Barcelona informants have reported using phrases like *te den*, *toma esa*, or *jódete* (variations of 'fuck off') while performing the *peineta* toward their interlocutors.

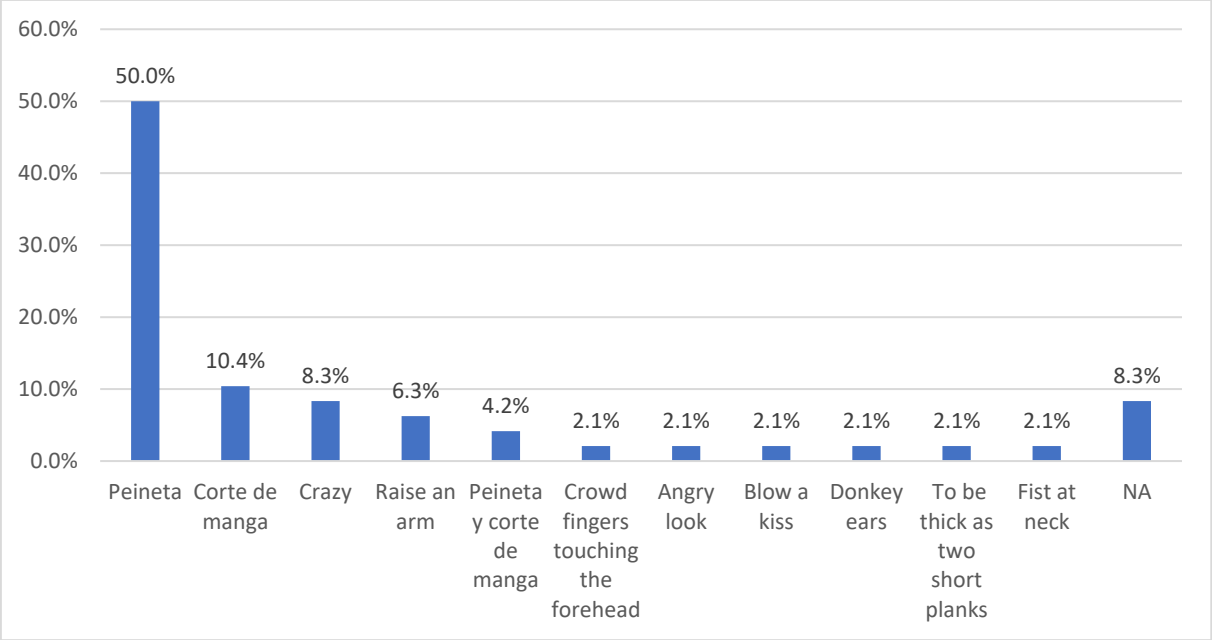

Figure 6. Total distribution of insult gestures.

In some instances, the gesture and the word seem inseparable, whereas, in other cases, the gestural insult gains all its strength and prominence when words are not possible or would be in vain because they would not be heard (due to physical distance, architectural barriers, etc.). It might even happen that someone gestures behind the recipient's back, avoiding provocation to the insulted person but allowing the insulter to release accumulated pressure. It is also possible that the insulted person may not perceive the insult, but those around them do. This is the case with gesture 7.

The gesture of *corte de manga* is practically known throughout the Western world (Baró 2013). It is a humiliating gesture that Barcelona informants perform accompanied by linguistic expressions like *vete a tomar por culo* or *vete a la mierda* (variations of 'fuck off'). The fact that it is a widely used gesture has led to different hypotheses about its origin. Some again refer to ancient Greco-Roman origins, while others document the birth of this gesture in France, where it is known as *bras d'honneur*. In any case, there is some agreement that it is again an obscene gesture, especially when expressed in an intensifying manner as in gesture 5, combined with the middle finger sign.

Another comment regarding the inventory of gestures from the interviewed Barcelonians pertains to gesture 4, where one vigorously raises the arm backward above the head in a threatening motion as if about to strike the recipient, and gesture 11, where a closed fist moves laterally at neck level with the thumb. In both cases, we consider that the mentioned gestures do not exactly convey insults but rather threatening gestures. The 'confusion' of the informants is understandable if, as often happens, threatening and insulting are speech acts that are frequently produced simultaneously.

Finally, gesture 6, to gather all the fingers of one hand and touch the forehead, and 10, to place the index and middle fingers on the forehead, are metonymic behaviors in which the bodily movement refers to touching the part of the body where the brain resides and consequently, intelligence, alluding to its absence in the case of the insulted interlocutor.

Analysis of Insult Gestures Based on Social Variables

Figure 7 shows the distribution by gender of the use of insult gestures.

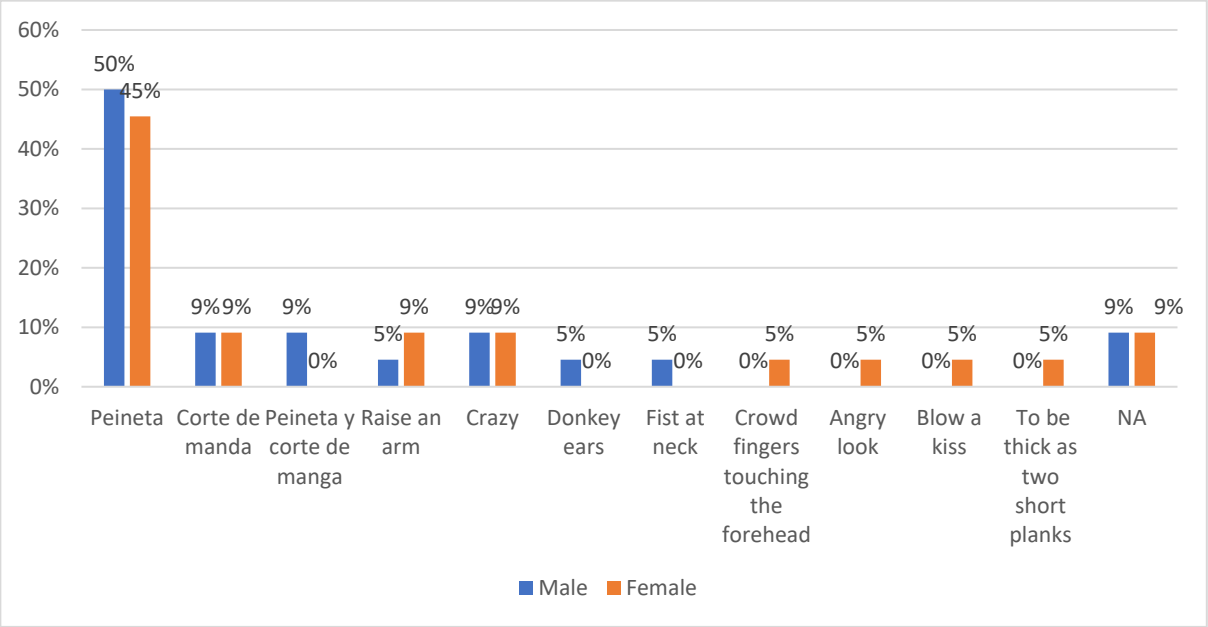

Figure 7. Distribution of insult gestures according to gender.

The study of nonverbal communication from a gender perspective is a very interesting topic, although there is not a wide tradition of studies on the subject. Cuddy (2016) analyzed the correlation between the use of some non-verbal behaviors such as tone of voice, smile, body posture, and certain gestures, more or less powerful attitudes, and the distribution of all these elements between men and women. Other authors (Sokolov et al. 2011) have attempted to provide the first empirical evidence of individual gender effects on the reading of body language, i.e., on the ability to adequately interpret what the other person says with their gestures and on the speed of doing so.

Baró (2013) states that, almost everywhere in the world, men know and use more insulting gestures and obscene gestures than women. The author alludes to interviews conducted in Russia, Latin America, Arab countries, and China. Moreover, in Spain, in general, women know most of the gestures but do not use them in the same way as men. The explanation provided by Baró is that men and women have the same capacity to send humiliating messages, but women have been educated to be more docile and more discreet. Surely it could be said that a woman who gestures rudely has a worse image in her environment.

In the current case, there are practically no differences in the use by men and women of the main insulting gestures provided by the Barcelonians since the questionnaire motivates the execution of the gesture. In this sense, it is worth considering the results of the *peineta* and the *corte de mangas*. The combined gesture of both, which, as has been said, shows the insult more intensely, is only performed by men in the sample analyzed. A qualitative analysis of the survey videos shows that women took longer to respond, blushed, and even laughed nervously when executing the gesture. However, the size of the sample prevents these data from being considered significant.

With regard to age, Figure 8 shows the results. It can be seen that the percentage of use of *peineta* in younger informants is more pronounced than in people between 35 and 54 years old and, especially, in people over 55 years old. These, on the other hand, are the only ones who use the gesture that evokes the crazy content, with its different variants already mentioned.

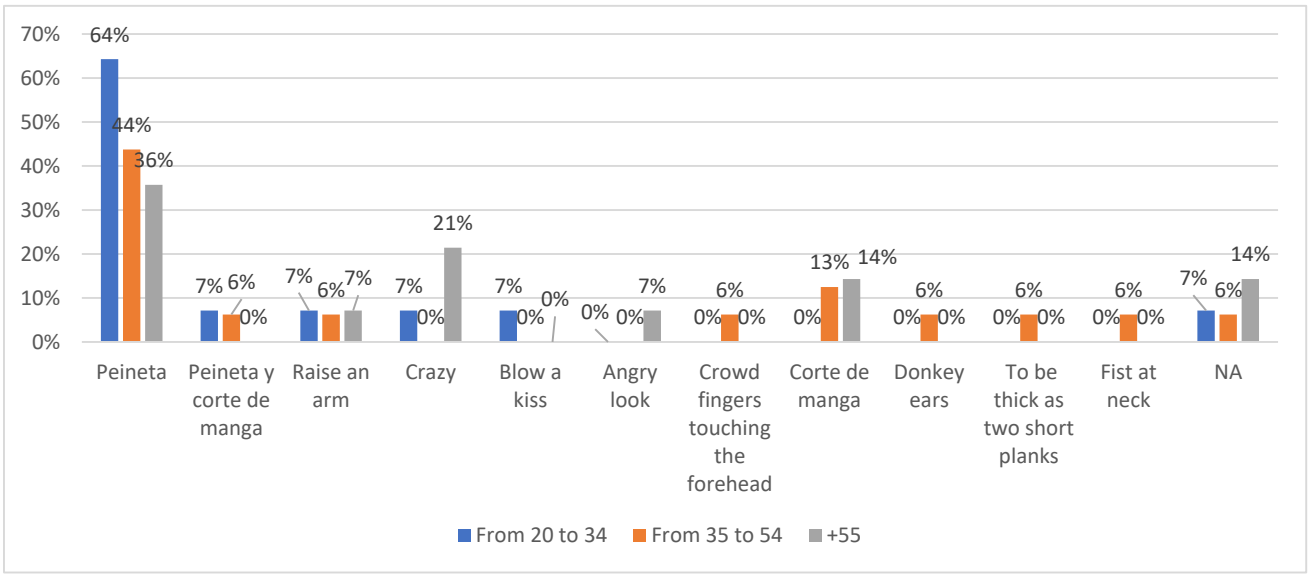

Figure 8. Distribution of insult gestures according to age.

Regarding the level of instruction (Figure 9), it is initially surprising that respondents with a university education use the *peineta* more, a gesture clearly frowned upon in some communicative contexts. The 10-percentage-point difference in the usage of the *peineta* between respondents with education level 3 and those with no education or primary education is noteworthy, to say the least.

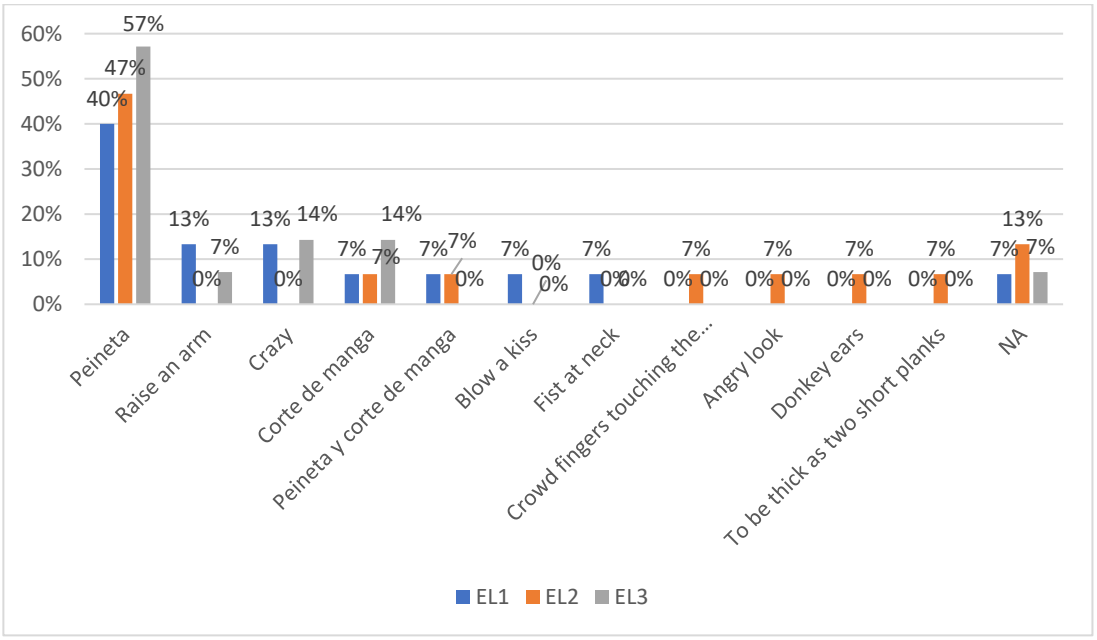

Figure 9. Distribution of insult gestures according to level of instruction.

The second part of the AdG questionnaire, which, as aforementioned, focuses on gathering information from the gesture's production form to its communicative function, asks respondents if they use the gesture displayed in a series of images and, if so, what meaning they attribute to it. This part includes the *peineta* gesture. Of the 36 respondents in the sample, 94.4% recognized the image and claimed to use the represented gesture. In regard to their intended usage, the distribution is as follows: 61.8% use it as the *peineta* insult; 35.2% use it to send someone away, dismissively. Only in one instance was it indicated that

the gesture was used in a very specific communicative situation: in a traffic jam, to address another driver (a second-generation male respondent with secondary education).

As for variation, both men and women use it equally. It is also employed across all age groups and educational levels, in a widespread manner.

4.3. Protective Gestures: Attracting Good Luck and Warding Off Bad Luck

The interviewees in Barcelona provided a total of 44 responses to the question "How do you attract good luck without using words, with a gesture?" and 43 responses to the question "How do you ward off bad luck without using words, with a gesture?" As we will see below, some of the gestures provided coincide, which is expected since, in a way, attracting good luck and warding off bad luck are two sides of the same coin.

Here is the list, firstly, of the 11 different gestures used by those surveyed in Barcelona to attract good luck, ordered by frequency:

1. Cross the index and middle fingers. Some informants make this gesture with one hand, while others use both hands, which, as seen in previous sections, intensifies the gesture.
2. Raising the gaze to the sky and clasping the palms together.
3. Looking up to the sky and opening the arms with palms facing upwards, emulating a priest's gesture.
4. Extending the arms and raising them to head level with open hands, making a motion from outside to inside, similar to the gesture for 'come here'.
5. Rubbing the thumb and index finger together in a movement similar to the one used to express 'money'.
6. *Tocar madera* ('Knock on wood'). The performance of this gesture is recorded with the palm of the hand outstretched and with the hand clenched into a fist.
7. Close your fists; raise your arms towards your head.
8. Extend the index and little fingers as horns; bring the horns to the side of the head, above the ear.
9. Raise both arms by the sides of the head and bring them down while rubbing the thumb and index finger together in a money sign gesture.
10. Rubbing hands together.
11. Cross oneself.

Figure 10 graphically shows the information that has just been described, and it can also be seen that the gesture of crossing the fingers (executed with one hand or with both hands) is, by far, the most used in the sense of attracting luck.

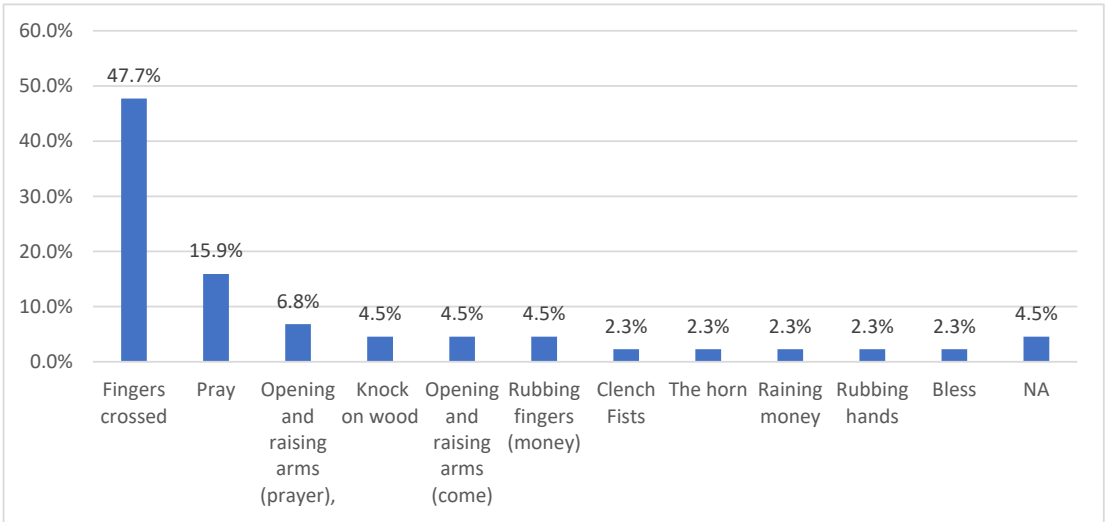

Figure 10. Total distribution of gestures to attract good luck.

With regard to warding off bad luck, the 43 productions of the Barcelona respondents resulted in a repertoire of 9 gestures, which are listed below, ordered by frequency of use. In addition, in the relevant cases, the variations in the execution of nonverbal behavior are specified at length.

1. Extend both arms forward and form a cross with the index fingers of both hands.
2. Extend the arms, open the hands, palms facing the body, and shake them. In this case, the shaking movement of the hands is performed while saying *fuera*, *fuera* ('go away, go away'). The gesture presents some variations of execution related to the height with respect to the body at which the hands are placed: at the height of the chest or the face and above the head. Another variation in the execution is linked to the form adopted by the hands, which, at times, are open and are shaken from this configuration and at other times are closed in a fist and the shaking is performed at the same time as the hands are opened and closed.
3. Extending the index and little fingers as a sign of horns. Although the basic sign is the gesture that symbolizes the horns, the execution of this in the different informants is varied: in some cases, the gesture is made with both hands; in others, with one. Furthermore, the fingers that make up the horned figure can be oriented in different directions: in some cases, they are brought to the palm of the other hand, which is extended, and light blows are given; at other times, the horned sign faces the sky with the hand that executes it in a vertical position; finally, the horned sign is directed towards the front of the body of the person executing the gesture and the hand is in a horizontal position. As for the arms, sometimes they are fully extended, while in the realizations of some informants, they are semi-flexed at the elbow.
4. Cross the index and middle fingers. Some individuals perform this gesture using only one hand, while others do it with both.
5. Knock on wood.
6. With the hand outstretched, shake the shoulder emulating the gesture that is made when you want to remove something from the clothes located on that part of the body (i.e., it would be the movement that is made to remove dandruff from the sweater).
7. Raising the gaze to the sky and clasping the palms together. The height at which the hands are placed varies: they can be at chest level or at face level.
8. Cross oneself.
9. Shaking the head in denial while simultaneously raising the right hand to chest level with a closed fist.

Figure 11 represents the response percentages for each of the gestures provided by the Barcelona informants.

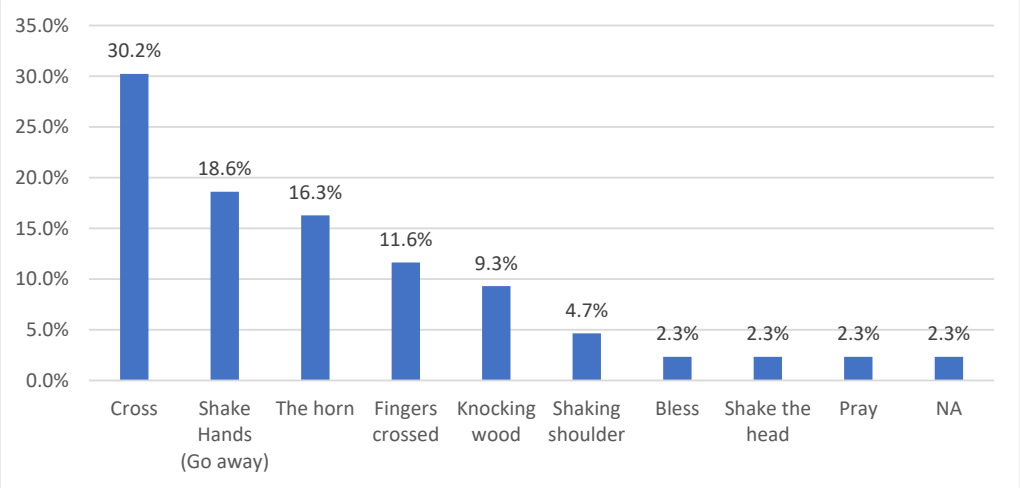

Figure 11. Total distribution of gestures to ward off bad luck.

In the case of warding off bad luck, the gesture with the highest usage rate, by far, is the one executed with arms extended forward, forming a cross with the index fingers of both hands. Thus, for both semantic contents, a gesture that mimics a cross stands out in the first place.

The cross has been a recognized symbol of the divine, magic, or supernatural since prehistoric times. In ancient American civilizations, the cross had a notable presence long before contact with Christianity in the 15th century, during the exploration of the New World and the arrival of missionaries. Anthropologists have discovered evidence of religious practices based on the cross in various cultures, suggesting a common connection in this regard across different regions. However, the use of the cross as a Christian symbol of devotion and protection emerged around the 4th or 5th century. Prior to that, other representations such as the chrism, the mystic lamb, or other symbols known as monograms were used. These were painted or engraved in catacombs and tombstones, seeking protection (Díaz 2010).

In the inventory of signs to attract good luck and ward off bad luck provided by the people of Barcelona, more non-verbal behaviors of a religious nature appear, such as making the sign of the cross. As known, those who practice Christianity use words along with the gesture of making the sign of the cross that clearly express the idea of warding off negativity: «Por la señal de la santa cruz de nuestros enemigos líbranos, Señor, Dios nuestro. En el nombre del Padre y del Hijo y del Espíritu Santo. Amén» ('By the sign of the Holy Cross, deliver us from evil, Lord, our God. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen').

Other gestures inventoried in this study, such as looking up to the sky and joining palms at chest level as if praying or looking up to the sky and opening arms with palms facing upward, resembling a priest's gesture, also present clear reminiscences of invoking divinity, seeking its shelter and protection.

From what has been mentioned, it can be inferred that the gestures associated with seeking good omens used by the interviewed people of Barcelona in this study are clearly influenced by Catholicism: images like the cross, its rituals, and the gestures of a priest during Mass or those of a believer in prayer. However, some informants mention using other gestures that do not have religious connotations. Among these are gestures corresponding to touching wood and making the horns gesture.

Superstitious people use the gesture of knocking on wood to annul the effects of a supposed evil spell that weighs on them, or to protect themselves from a possible future misfortune. The corresponding phrase is *toquemos madera* ('knocking wood'), which normally accompanies the gesture. Non-verbal behavior and linguistic expression are, in a certain sense, inseparable, so that if there is no wood around the informant who provides this gesture and emits the phrase, the person feels the space with his or her hand and even touches his or her head in search of the supposed wood.

Regarding the origin of touching wood as an action associated with the attraction of good luck, there are different explanatory theories (Andrews 2023). One common interpretation relates the phenomenon to ancient pagan cultures such as the Celts, who believed that spirits and gods resided in trees. Knocking on tree trunks served to awaken the spirits and request their protection, but it was also a way of showing gratitude for a good run of luck. Other researchers affirm that the beliefs concerning wood are also found in Christianity and that they allude to the material from which the cross on which Jesus Christ died was made.

As for the horns gesture, it has a wide geographical extension of use that covers the European countries of the Mediterranean basin and the American countries of Latin influence (Baró 2013). Although horns as a nonverbal insulting behavior was not an item contributed by the Barcelona informants in this study, gesture dictionaries record its meaning as 'cuckold', usually alluding to a man whose wife is unfaithful. For the Barcelona informants, the horns are a non-verbal behavior allusive to attract good luck and, especially,

to ward off bad omens. With this value, it was already used in ancient Rome, so, once again, we are dealing with the non-verbal behavior of millenary tradition.

Fornés and Puig (2008) document the existence of a mosaic from the 6th century B. C. in which a character appears making the gesture of the horns with one hand. The meaning of this gestural unit varied if the horns were oriented upwards or downwards. In the latter position, it was a gesture of protection and defense against the evil eye. Some people from Barcelona still use it today as a non-verbal sign to ward off negative things.

The repertoire of gestures used by individuals in Barcelona to refer to matters related to luck deserves several more comments. On one hand, it is noteworthy that two of the gestures proposed by the participants for attracting good luck, specifically gesture 5 and gesture 9, correspond to the movement made with the thumb and index finger commonly associated with the notion of 'money'.

On the other hand, the semantic contents queried allow participants to use deictic gestures. In other words, to attract good luck, some informants mentioned extending their arms and raising them to head height with open hands, making an inward motion (towards the place occupied by the sought-after luck), and pointing towards themselves. As for the gesture to ward off bad luck, the movement is precisely the opposite: it comes from the person making the gesture and moves outward, pointing to a space away from them and supposedly towards whoever might receive the negative news or event. The first gesture is often accompanied by the linguistic expression *ven*, *ven*, while the gestures to ward off bad luck are accompanied by phrases like *vete*; *fuera*, *fuera*; *sal*; *aléjate*; *quita*, *quita* ('get out'; 'move, move'; 'go away'. . .).

Finally, also concerning the linguistic expressions used in conjunction with gestures to ward off bad luck, one informant, a second-generation individual with primary education, mentioned *lagarto*, *lagarto* (lit. 'lizard, lizard'). Another informant, also a second-generation individual but with university studies, used the Latin expression *vade retro*, *Satanás* (lit. 'retreat, Satan').

Analysis of Protective Gestures Based on Social Variables

Figures 12 and 13 show the distribution by gender of the gestures to attract good luck and to ward off bad luck used by the Barcelonians in the sample of this study. In both cases, the differences shown allow us to point out some noteworthy facts. For example, men have a more varied repertoire of gestures for the contents asked about, and some of the gestures they use are not even mentioned by the women in the sample interviewed. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that no women say that they use the gesture of touching wood to attract good luck (there are men who use it with this value), and, on the other hand, they use it in greater proportion than men to ward off bad luck. The gesture of the horns follows a similar pattern.

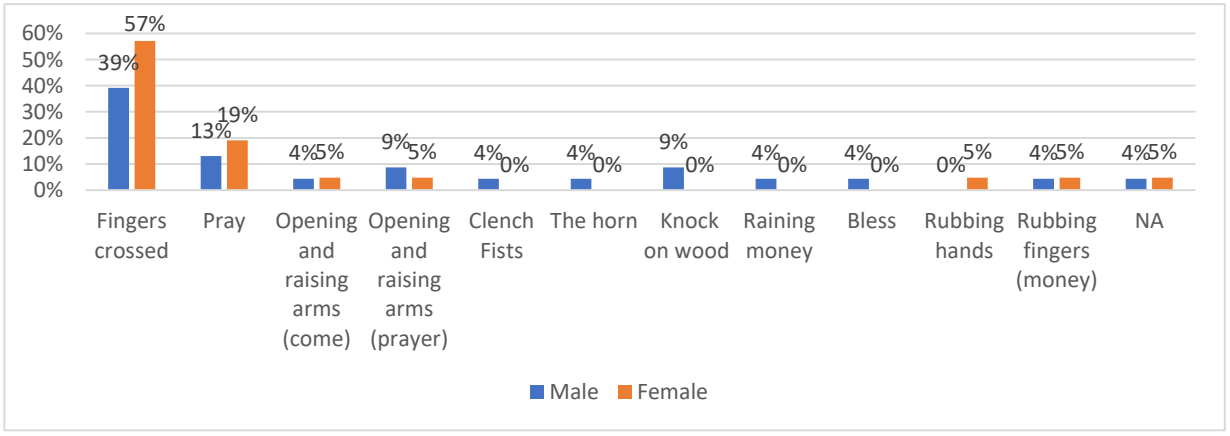

Figure 12. Distribution of attracting good luck gestures according to gender.

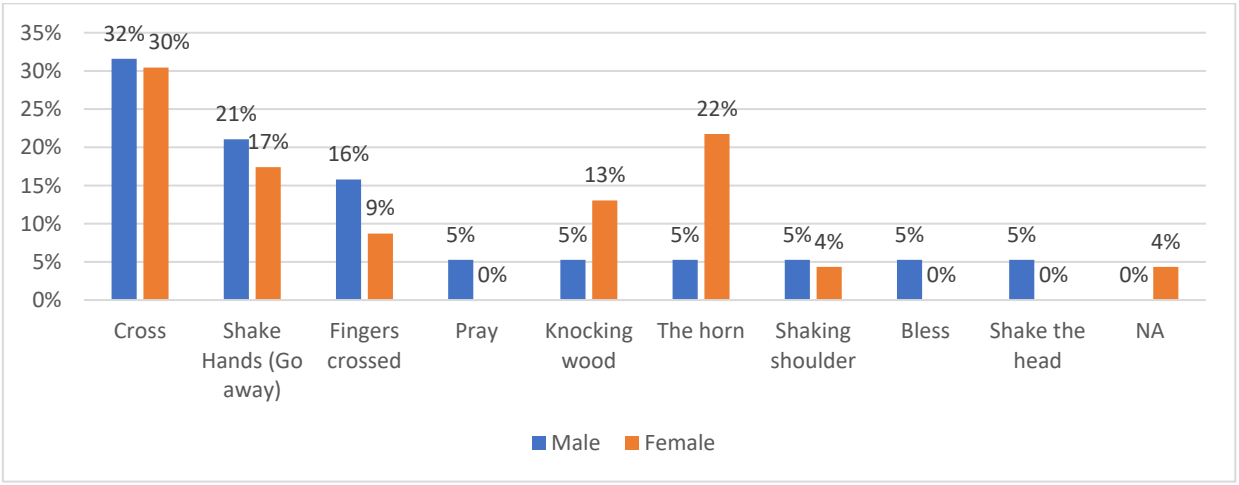

Figure 13. Distribution of warding off bad luck gestures according to gender.

The distribution of gestures is shown graphically below considering the age of the informants (Figures 14 and 15). As observed with the gender variable, there is a greater diversity in the gestural repertoire provided by individuals of a specific age group: in this case, people surveyed in Barcelona aged over 55. This is especially noticeable in gestures to attract good luck: when comparing the results from this age group with those of Barcelonians aged between 35 and 54, it is the latter who extensively uses the crossed fingers gesture. Concerning gestures to ward off bad luck among respondents in this age group, the use of the horn gesture is significant in Figure 15. This is the gesture predominantly used by Barcelonians aged 35 to 54 to ward off a bad omen.

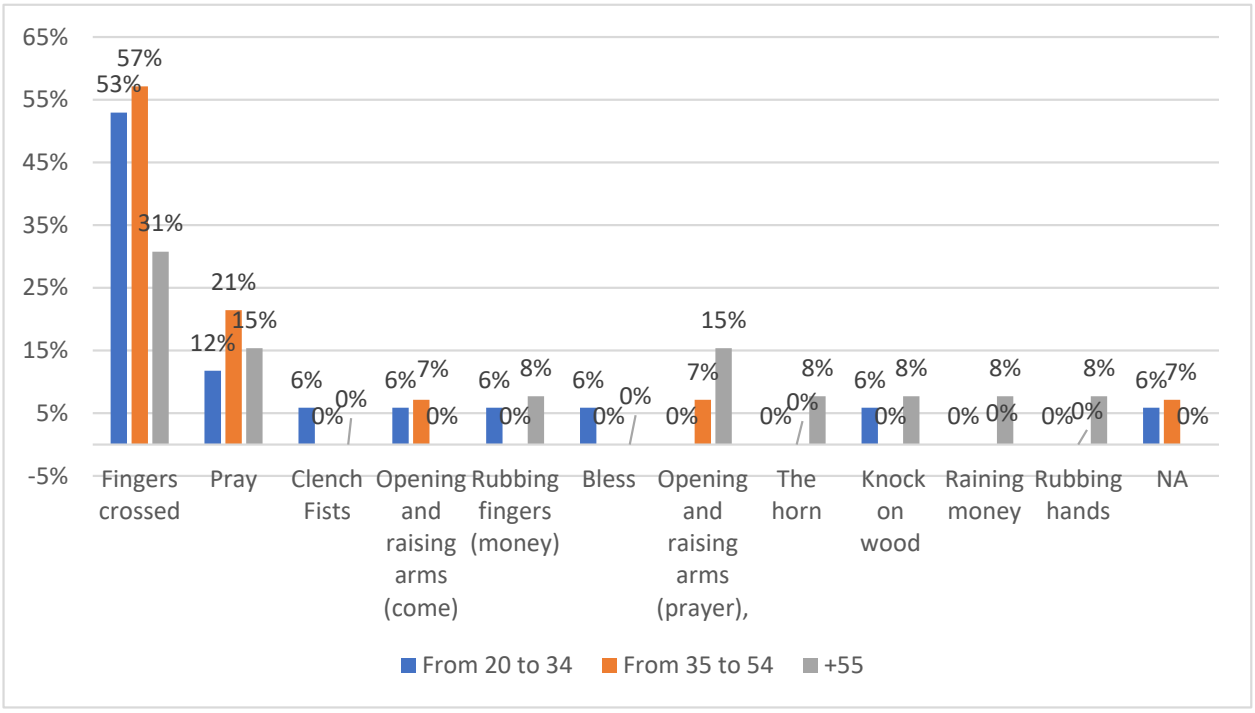

Figure 14. Distribution of gestures to attract good luck according to age.

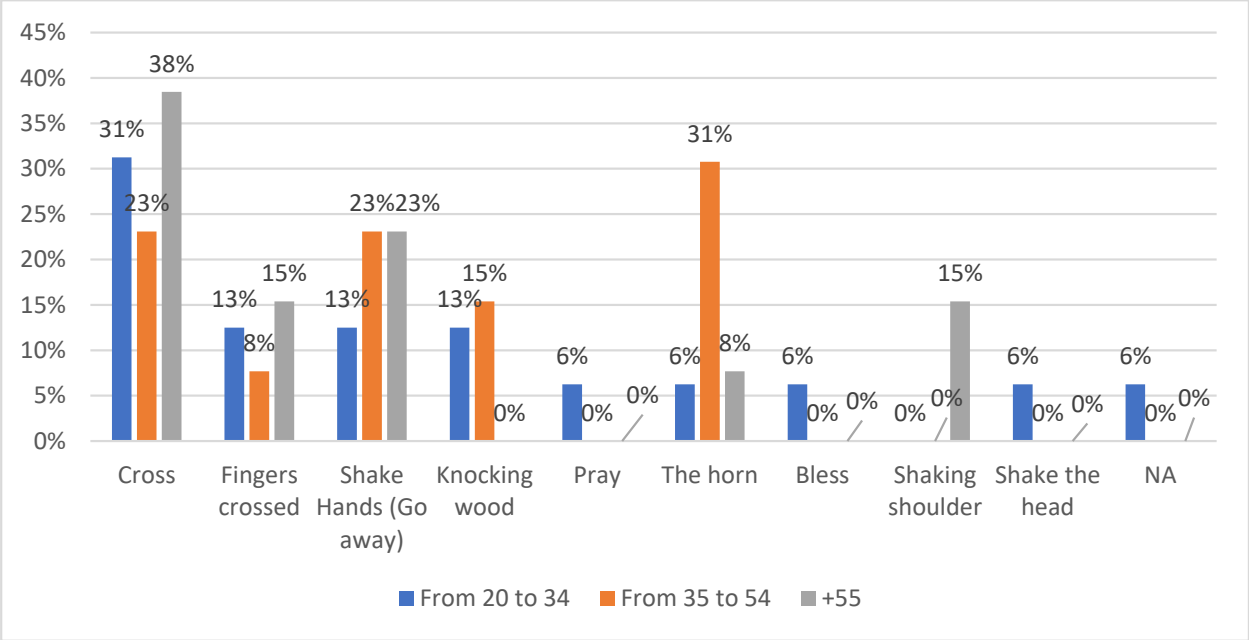

Figure 15. Distribution of gestures to ward off bad luck according to age.

Finally, respondents over 55 are the only ones who mention using the shoulder-shrugging gesture to ward off bad luck. This gesture, documented only in some of the older respondents, resembles the action used to counteract the bad luck caused by spilling salt, although the execution is not precisely the same: the Barcelonians make a motion with an extended hand that seems to be 'brushing off' the shoulder; to counteract the bad luck caused by spilling salt, superstitious individuals simulate throwing imaginary salt over their shoulder.

Regarding the distribution of gestures in relation to the level of instruction, the results are shown in Figures 16 and 17. Corresponding to gestures to attract good luck, the most used gesture is, as we have already seen, crossing the fingers, and there is a notable preference for this form of expression on the part of informants with university studies.

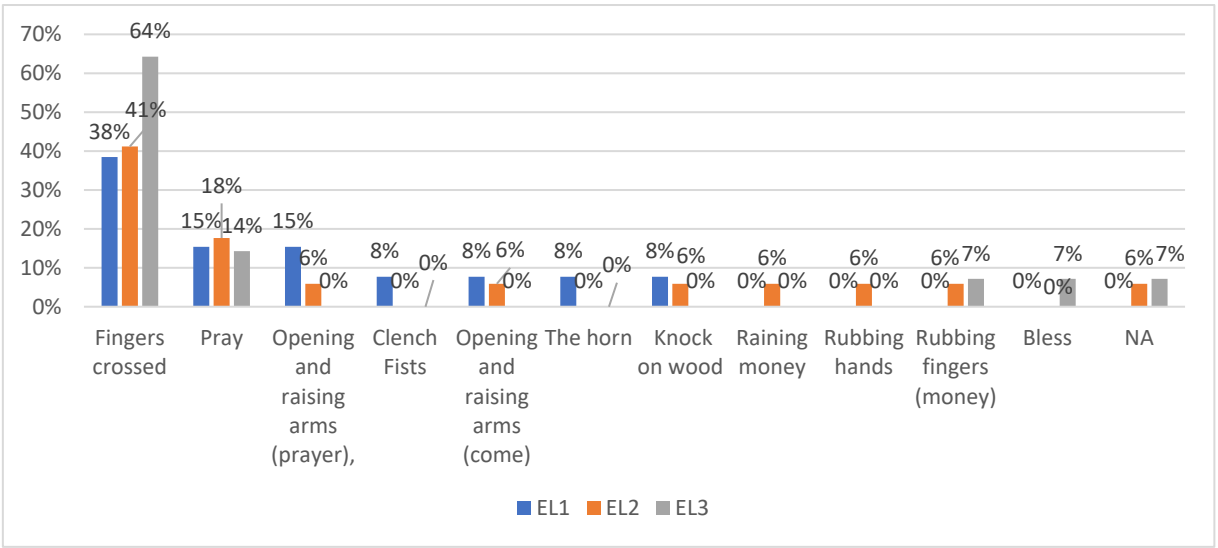

Figure 16. Distribution of gestures to attract good luck according to level of instruction.

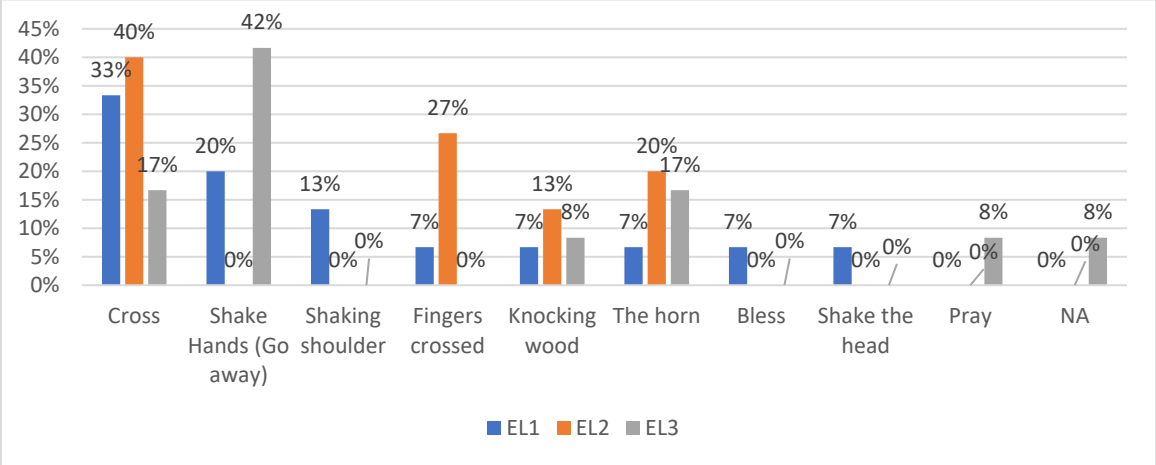

Figure 17. Distribution of gestures to ward off bad luck according to level of instruction.

For the gestures corresponding to warding off bad luck, the Barcelonians with university studies act quite differently from the rest: there is a tendency to use, above all, the gesture of shaking the hands outward with the intention of warding off negative elements. Informants from Barcelona with university studies use the gesture most used in general to ward off bad luck much less than informants with other levels of education: extending the arms forward and forming a cross with the index fingers of both hands.

To conclude the data analysis section, let us revisit the outcomes obtained from the second part of the AdG questionnaire, as previously discussed, focusing on the collection of information spanning from the production form of the gesture to its communicative function. Regarding the meaning of attracting good luck and warding off bad luck, respondents were asked whether they use the gestures depicted in Figures 18 and 19.

Figure 18. Image asking about the knock-on-wood gesture in the AdG questionnaire.

In total, 66.7% of the informants recognized the image, while 33.3% did not. As for the use given to this gesture by the informants who identify it, the distribution is as follows: 33.3% indicate that they use it to point at something while 25% indicate that they use it to attract good luck and 12.5% to ward off bad luck. Other less frequent values are to let someone pass, to give instructions, to simply touch a tree, or to make a wish. No relevant patterns of use can be established for the variables of gender, age, and education level. The diversity of meanings contributed by the Barcelona informants to this photograph will be further addressed in the discussion section.

Figure 19. Image asking for the finger-crossing gesture in the AdG questionnaire.

In total, 86.1% of the informants recognized the image, 13.9% did not. As for the use given to this gesture by the informants who identify it, the distribution is as follows: 77.8% indicate that they use it to ask for or wish good luck and 8% indicate that they use it to make a wish. Other less frequent values are to ward off bad luck or to lie. In this case, the results obtained in this part of the test coincide with those obtained in the communicative function part of the production since the gesture of crossing one's fingers is the one most frequently used by the Barcelonians surveyed to attract good luck. Nonetheless, no differences can be established with regard to the gender variable since both men and women use it in a similar way to ask for or to wish good luck; the same occurs across different generations and education levels.

5. Discussion

It is pertinent to frame the discussion of the results obtained in this article within the context of the initial research related to the development of the AdG. As the project coordinator explains, the intention is to construct a digital and dynamic gesture atlas that goes beyond mapping signs, aiming to visualize their geolectal or cultural uses. This project has been structured as a coordinated macro-project, expecting the involvement of teams from diverse backgrounds, collecting corpora from their communities through guided remote surveys, and analyzing them to provide the most frequent signs and generate usage maps (Cestero 2023). However, the objective of this project extends beyond creating a pan-Hispanic atlas; the primary goal is to encourage comparative studies among communities. While the design of the portal has been costly, it offers the significant advantage of being easily applicable to the geolectal study of gestures in other linguistic communities.

The AdG is an extremely ambitious project for many reasons; one of the fundamental reasons is the exhaustiveness of the questionnaire used to collect the data, which was drawn up on the basis of the most complete repertoires of Spanish gestures published to date (Cestero 2023). The purpose of the questionnaire is to document the possible cultural variants of a selection of basic gestures of different types but also to ascertain the gestures available in the communities, as well as the incidence of social factors, specifically gender, age, or education level, on their frequency of use. This is a detailed tool—the 75 entries, structured into 8 macro-functions and 34 entries with images—that enables research teams to compile a large volume of information that has never been gathered before with such rigor and using methodologies according to the nature of non-verbal signs (Cestero 2016). In this sense, the development of the gestural atlas represents a definitive advance for studies on gestural variation in Spanish, a topic that has been practically unexplored in a scientific manner in previous works or research.

The early stages of the AdG construction project revealed methodological issues that will have to be reviewed. Moreover, although, on occasions, potential informants are reluctant to be filmed in a process that most of the time takes more than an hour, the Barcelona team has already completed the fieldwork and is beginning the analysis phase from which works such as Forment and Illamola (2023) and this article derive. In them, it

has been possible to gauge how laborious the interview collection process has been (we have a total of 45 interviews, although on this occasion we only worked with a balanced sample of 36 informants).

As already aforementioned in this article, the emptying of the interviews has made it possible to corroborate the enormous variety of responses that it is possible to collect even from an *a priori* relatively small sample of informants (2 per box). Indeed, in the part of the questionnaire that goes from the communicative function to the production of the gesture, the fact that an open question is posed to the informant (for example, "how do you express mockery without using words, with a gesture?") favors the multiplicity of responses. Moreover, since the data are collected via video, it is possible to review this material as many times as necessary until very detailed descriptions of the nonverbal action performed by the informant are obtained. This fact, which is very positive because of the rigor achieved in the transcription of the responses, greatly atomizes the data so that the work becomes more qualitative than quantitative. Nevertheless, working with an enlarged sample will make it possible to apply statistical techniques to ascertain the significance of the trends indicated in this work.

As for the methodological limitations of the study of gestures, it has already been noted previously that it is sometimes difficult to adequately interpret which gesture a verbal-linguistic description refers to, even though it has been elaborated with great detail and rigor. This is the reason that in this article, we have included illustrative images of the gestural repertoires achieved for each of the communicative functions studied (see Appendix A). However, it is also sometimes difficult to capture a gesture, which is essentially movement, in a photograph, which is characterized by being static. This may be the explanation for the results obtained in the questionnaires of the people from Barcelona in response to the questions formulated based on the image shown in Figure 18, which, since it contains a tree, was considered ideal for representing the gesture of touching wood. However, a methodological error likely occurred at this point in the elaboration of the questionnaire, which now emerges with the results.

It is needless to say the gestural units studied in this work are interesting since they correspond to semantic contents that, as we have seen, have been transmitted with gestures since time immemorial. Their study, unexplored until now as far as their actual use is concerned, has allowed us to see their degree of validity in Barcelona society today. Many of these gestures refer to religious elements that have been fossilized in gestural units that have survived for centuries in a society in which the number of atheists continues to grow (Congostrina 2022). Possibly, some informants are no longer able to appreciate the motivation of the meaning of some of the gestures used to attract good luck or to ward off bad luck. It is the same thing that happens for some speakers who are no longer aware that the motivation of the now opaque meaning of the Spanish phraseological unit *quedarse sin blanca* ('to have no money') was at one time transparent because the *blanca* was a type of legal tender. This point reveals an aspect whose investigation would be very interesting in future works: for what reasons do Barcelonians believe that they use the gestures they use to express the meanings they attach to them? This sort of gestural etymology arising from the opinion/reflection of the user of the gesture would perhaps contribute to establishing the correlations between gestures and social variables whose analysis has not yet been carried out in-depth in this article.

On this occasion and with the data available, everything seems to indicate that it would be more appropriate to present qualitative conclusions, equally valid for comparing the gestures indicated by the informants of Barcelona with those collected in the different regions or areas to express the same meanings. However, if this question is analyzed from the perspective of critical sociolinguistics, which conceives of linguistic practices as structuring relations and reproducing relations of inequality (Pujolar 2012), it is possible to go somewhat deeper into the results obtained. Along these lines, if one examines again the *peineta* gesture specifically by crossing the variables age and gender, a noteworthy trend can be observed, as seen in Figure 20.

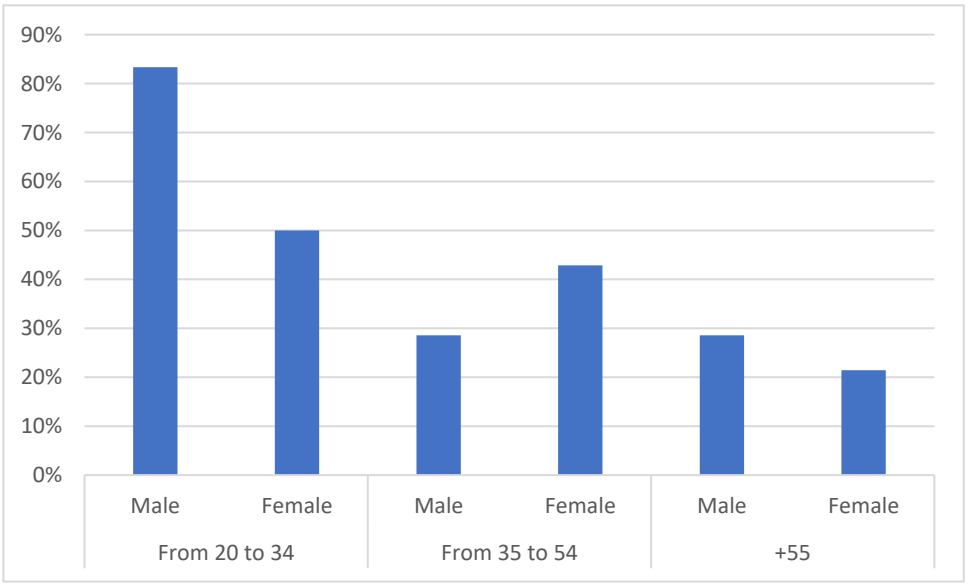

Figure 20. Distribution of *peineta* gesture according to gender and age.

One could say, on one hand, that the profile of the informant who uses the gesture the most is a young man. As for women's behavior, it can be noted that there is a greater use by women of the second generation. Specifically, these are women born before the 90's, which could perhaps be related to an act of reclaiming female empowerment through gestural expressions.

If we now look at the results only on the basis of the age variable, we can compare the younger generation (the innovation carrier) with those over 55 years old (generation 3). For example, for mocking gestures, it has been indicated that the gesture most used by the younger generation is pointing and laughing, but for generation 3, it is more common just to laugh. For insulting gestures, the young generation has a clear preference for the *peineta*, although the third generation is divided between the *peineta* and the gesture of crazy. As for attracting good luck, we can perceive a move away from the explicit practice of religion on the part of the young as indicated above since it is the elders who use the gesture of joining hands as if praying. However, neither can it be affirmed that adults over 55 years of age are practitioners since it would have been necessary to ask them explicitly about it. However, just as beliefs, values, and ideologies are transmitted mainly within the family and education, many of these gestures have been inherited and incorporated, detached from their primary origin.

Analyzing the data without forgetting the body and its messages broadens the understanding and the possibility of analysis of a specific significant context. Moreover, these data lead us to visualize possible generational changes and distinctive identities of a specific moment. As Darío Blanco points out, "los jóvenes y los subalternos apelan al movimiento corporal, al juego con las estéticas, con las normas y su rompimiento. Es la creación, como en collage, de su propia identidad [. . .] en el uso del cuerpo y las interpelaciones que logran con él. Establecen mundos de vida (que aglutinen a iguales y los diferencie de los otros) a partir de estos símbolos estéticos y de sus propios canales de comunicación, sus propios lenguajes" (Blanco 2008).

In future research, it will be useful to increase the number of Barcelona informants of the AdG belonging to the first age generation (from 20 to 34 years old) and the third (55 years old or older) in order to enlarge the sample and to be able to carry out more detailed comparative studies on the issue addressed here.

6. Conclusions

This paper analyzes the gestures used in Spanish to express mockery, insult, and protection. The results are based on the answers provided by 36 Barcelona informants from

the AdG, a digital atlas of gestures in the process of elaboration. The sample of Barcelona residents selected is stratified by quotas. Specifically, the stratification is based on three variables: gender, age, and level of education.

The article answers two research questions. Firstly, in order to answer the question "What gestures do Barcelonians use to express mockery, insult, and invoke good luck and protection?", four gestural repertoires have been elaborated, which include the gestures, with their corresponding variants, used by Barcelonians to express the semantic contents mentioned. These repertoires are made up of the following number of gestures: 10 gestures of mockery; 11 of insult; 11 to attract good luck; and 9 to ward off bad luck. The gestures are presented in order of the frequency of use. In this way, the consultation of the article offers verbal and visual information on which is the gesture most used by the surveyed Barcelonians for the meanings analyzed.

In the article, it has been documented that many of the gestures used today by the Barcelonians surveyed are, in reality, millenary gestures that were already used in Greco-Roman antiquity with the same meaning. Among others, this is the case of sticking out the tongue, the horns, or the *peineta*. In fact, most of the gestures provided by the people of Barcelona for the expression of the contents studied are emblematic, a fact that implies a conventionalization that has crystallized over time between the body movement and the meaning it conveys.

Other gestures, on the other hand, are possibly more recent. This is the case of the gesture to indicate laughing, known and used especially by informants of the first generation. In fact, gestures, as a living communication system, evolve and change over time. Thus, for example, today, when a young person expresses with a gesture the content of a photograph, very often he/she makes the body movement with only one hand, a closed fist, and a thumb press, emulating the movement we make when we take a photograph with a cell phone, the device with which most photographs are taken nowadays (and the only one with which young people are familiar for this purpose). In other words, reality changes and so does the gestural system that represents it.

The second research question posed in this article is related to the detection of gestural peculiarities that we can ascribe to specific social groups. Do men and women use different gestures? Do they gesture more than men? Are there gestures that only older people know? Does the degree of education of the person influence his or her gestural catalog and the frequency with which he or she gestures? Are gestures used differently in Barcelona than in Buenos Aires? In fact, these are some of the questions that we intend to resolve by applying sociolinguistic assumptions to the study of gestures and the elaboration of the AdG. It is worth remembering that there is no recent research on this issue for Spanish and that, therefore, the coordinated elaboration of the AdG, a very ambitious and complex project, will allow us to make an important qualitative leap in the study of nonverbal communication from a variationist perspective.

The screening of the 36 questionnaires that constitute the analysis sample based on the social variables has made it possible, in this article, to detect some trends in the correlations between the gender, age, and level of education of the people of Barcelona and the gestures used. Furthermore, looking at the data on the basis of other variables such as profession, knowledge of other languages, or place of origin would provide a more detailed view of the variation in the gestures analyzed.

On the other hand, it would be advisable to increase the sample of informants to see if it is possible to move from trends to statistically significant differences. In addition, it would be necessary to apply other data collection techniques (complementary to the questionnaire), which would allow a qualitative and complementary view to the descriptive and quantitative analysis. In other words, the analysis of other factors such as the number of participants in the interaction, the intention of the sender, the perception of the receiver, and the context in which the communicative exchange takes place become fundamental in a detailed investigation of mockery and insult, and it would be convenient to add the technique of direct observation of spontaneous interactive processes in the collection of

data. This way, it would be possible to more reliably capture the use of the gestural units that have been analyzed in this paper by Barcelonians.

In conclusion, the different perspectives from which the researcher can approach the analysis of gestures (from sociolinguistics to language learning and teaching and the analysis of social interaction) make this study an open door for new research proposals.

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Appendix A

In this appendix we have enclosed four tables to list all the gestures for each function. In the first column, we indicate the number of descriptions of the gesture, which, as indicated, are ordered from most to least frequent. In the second column, we include an image to exemplify the gesture; in the third column, the description of the gesture has been copied, and, finally, the label used in the figures is indicated.

Appendix A.1. Repertoire of Gestures of Mockery

Number	Picture	Verbal Description of Gesture	Reference Tag on the Figures
1.		Sticking out the tongue	Sticking out the tongue
2.		Pointing to the person being mocked, with the arm stretched out and the index finger in the direction of the person and laughing	Pointing and laughing

Number	Picture	Verbal Description of Gesture	Reference Tag on the Figures
3.		To bring the thumb of the hand to the nose while shaking the other extended fingers	"Pam i pipa"
4.		Laugh directly at the interlocutor	Laugh
5.		Place the thumbs on each temple and move the fingers back and forth.	Donkey ears
6.		Rest the index finger on the temple and make a rotating motion.	Similar to crazy
7.		Raise the arm energetically backward, over the head, in the same motion used to say "anda ya" ('Come on!')	Raise the arm

Number	Picture	Verbal Description of Gesture	Reference Tag on the Figures
8.		Using the palm of the hand stretched out, repeatedly strike the stomach, mimicking the action of splitting the body in two	Cracking up
9.		Slowly clapping	Slow clap
10.		Moving the hand at face level while saying *telita* ('oh my god')	Shake a hand

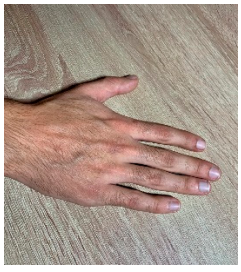
Appendix A.2. Repertoire of Gestures of Insult

Number	Picture	Verbal Description of Gesture	Reference Tag on the Figures
1.		Raising the middle finger while the rest of the fingers are tucked in	*Peineta*
2.		Raise a bent arm while striking on it at the inside of the elbow with the opposite hand (*corte de manga*; 'V-sign')	*Corte de manga*

Number	Picture	Verbal Description of Gesture	Reference Tag on the Figures
3.		Rest the index finger on the temple and make a rotating motion	Crazy
4.		Raise the arm energetically backward, above the head, with a threatening motion as if the gesture sender were about to strike the receptor	Raise an arm
5.		Combine the *peineta* and the *corte de manga*	*Peineta* and *corte de manga*
6.		Press all the fingers of one hand together and touch the forehead. Then, separate the hand from the forehead while keeping the fingers together	Crowd fingers touching the forehead

Number	Picture	Verbal Description of Gesture	Reference Tag on the Figures
7.		Raise the index and middle fingers of one hand and place them in a V-shape (symbolizing, once again, donkey ears) behind the head of the person being insulted	Donkey ears
8.		To blow a kiss in a sarcastic manner	Blow a kiss
9.		Showing anger with the look, without an emblem or gesture	Angry look
10.		Extend the index and middle fingers over the forehead and tap on it	To be thick as two short planks
11.		Clenched fist, the thumb moves laterally at neck level	Fist at neck

Appendix A.3. Repertoire of Gestures to Attract Good Luck

Number	Picture	Verbal Description of Gesture	Reference Tag on the Figures
1.		Cross the index and middle fingers	Fingers crossed
2.		Raising the gaze to the sky and clasping the palms together	Pray
3.		Looking up to the sky and opening the arms with palms facing upwards	Opening and raising arms (prayer)
4.		Extending the arms and raising them to head level with open hands	Opening and raising arms (come)
5.		Rubbing the thumb and index finger together	Rubbing fingers (money)
6.		Knock on wood	Knock on wood

Number	Picture	Verbal Description of Gesture	Reference Tag on the Figures
7.		Close your fists; raise your arms towards your head	Clench fists
8.		Extend the index and little fingers as horns; bring the horns to the side of the head, above the ear	The horn
9.		Raise both arms by the sides of the head and bring them down while rubbing the thumb and index finger together in a money sign gesture	Raining money
10.		Rubbing hands	Rubbing hands
11.		Cross oneself	Bless

Appendix A.4. Repertoire of Gestures to Ward Off Bad Luck

Number	Picture	Verbal Description of Gesture	Reference Tag on the Figures
1.		Extend both arms forward and form a cross with the index fingers of both hands	Cross
2.		Extend the arms, open the hands, palms facing the body, and shake them	Shake hands (go away)
3.		Extending the index and little fingers as a sign of horns	The horn
4.		Cross the index and middle fingers	Fingers crossed
5.		Knock on wood	Knock on wood

Number	Picture	Verbal Description of Gesture	Reference Tag on the Figures
6.		With the hand outstretched, shake the shoulder emulating the gesture that is made when you want to remove something from the clothes located on that part of the body	Shaking shoulder
7.		Raising the gaze to the sky and clasping the palms together	Pray
8.		Cross oneself	Bless
9.		Shaking the head in denial while simultaneously raising the right hand to chest level with a closed fist.	Shake the head

Notes

1 Payrató (2023) reviews the concept of emblematic gesture in the tradition of Hispanic studies on gesturality, contrasting the ideas, proposals and theoretical frameworks used to analyze this type of gesture, also known by other names (symbolic, folkloric, semiotic, autonomous gestures, etc.).

2 Work available at https://mele.web.uah.es/diccionario_gestos/ (accessed on 13 May 2024).

3 Forment and Illamola (2023) include a detailed description of the structure and contents of the DAGE.

4 Cestero (1999) does not report, for example, any mocking or insulting gestures.

5 A recent research project led by Duñabeitia and Méndez involving more than 2500 people from all the regions of Spain has managed to answer this question. The people participating in the study indicate in a very simple application some details about their sociodemographic profile and the three one-word insults they use most frequently. After reviewing almost 8000 insults, it has been possible to create a map of the use of each of these insults and to determine which words are most frequently used in Spain to offend according to the place and age of the people (Duñabeitia and Méndez 2020).

[6] The 8 macro-functions are the following: (1) Gestures that are used in social relations; (2) Gestures that identify and gestures that locate or point; (3) Gestures that describe people, objects, places or abstract concepts; (4) Gestures that serve to show emotions, sensations and moods; (5) Gestures that evoke everyday physical actions/activities; (6) Directive gestures, which require action from the recipient; (7) Gestures that regulate interaction; and (8) Gestures of mockery, insult, protection. For a more specific list of the 75 gestures, see Cestero (2023).

[7] It is worth noting that the gesture most used by the Barcelonians surveyed is precisely the only one used by the DAGE to express mockery.

[8] See the monograph on this gesture by Taylor (1956) and Morris et al. (1979).

[9] It must be taken into account that laughter is a non-verbal behavior within paralanguage and should not be considered a gesture.

[10] From the expression *tela marinera*.

[11] Since there were informants providing more than one gesture for each function, in order to calculate the percentages, it was necessary to create sets of multiple responses using SPSS. However, the totals have been calculated out of 100% and not out of the total percentage, which is always greater than 100%. The results show that individuals tend to prefer one gesture over another (depending on age, gender or level of education), but this trend did not reach statistical significance ($p > 0.05$). It is important to note that the sample used in this study was relatively small, which may have affected the study's ability to detect significant effects.

[12] The DLE has the following meaning for this word: "Gesto de significado obsceno y ofensivo que se hace levantando el brazo con el dedo corazón extendido y la palma de la mano hacia dentro" ('A gesture of obscene and offensive meaning made by raising the arm with the middle finger extended and the palm of the hand facing inwards').

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