A STUDY ON HANDEDNESS
IN CITONGA MULTIMODAL INTERACTIONS

AN ABSTRACT

SUBMITTED ON THE NINETEENTH DAY OF MARCH 2015

TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY
OF THE SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS
OF TULANE UNIVERSITY

FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOPHY

BY

Karen Wu Sanders

APPROVED: Olanike O. Orie
Olanike Ola Orie, Ph.D.
Director

Judith M. Maxwell, Ph.D.

Nathalie Dajko, Ph.D.

Mark Dingemanse, Ph.D.
Abstract

CiTonga speakers in Malawi describe dominant use of the left hand as distasteful and offensive in face-to-face multimodal interactions, communicative exchanges involving both oral-auditory and visual-gestural actions. They observe a left hand taboo on religious and social grounds, linking the right hand to “good” and the left hand to “bad”. Despite this widespread perception, CiTonga speakers were often observed using their left hand and eschewing the taboo even in serious situations where politeness is a social imperative. In this study, I aim to resolve this paradox by arguing that the significance of left hand taboo is domain specific. To do this, I collected 101 multimodal interactions—over 50 hours of recording—through participant observation in Cifila and Kavuzi, where CiTonga is spoken as a native language. I analyzed the gestures in two domains of interaction: everyday rituals and ordinary talks. For both domains, flexibility of handedness is determined by a ranking of four different contextual constraints. I proposed a decision matrix to describe how the type and scale of a constraint can explain the permissiveness of left hand use. CiTonga kinesic signs can elevate to taboo status when they violate the handedness convention for interlocutors with distant social relationships, but over-producing deferential signs can create a social imbalance between close affiliates. Selecting an interaction-appropriate hand preference is therefore an integral part of CiTonga communicative competence. A study on taboo in multimodality shows the ways in which domain structure and purpose shape the application of large sociocultural ideologies to spontaneous interactions in daily life.
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For my parents
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1 Introduction

As I sat eating lunch with a family in Kavuzi village in northern Malawi during the summer of 2012, I watched a group of young girls eating together, their bodies forming in a circle surrounding plates of shared food containing beans, *nsima* (porridge), and vegetables. The girls were cousins of the same extended family and sat in small clusters organized by age. An adult woman of the family looked on from her seat, a cut tree stump, supervising the progress of the meal. One of the girls, three-year old Mphatso, sat with her legs crossed, overlapping at the ankles, and stretched her arm forward to reach the plate of shared food.

![Figure 1.1  A young girl reached over for food on her left](image)
With a look of disapproval, the supervising adult exclaimed in ciTonga, a Malawian Bantu language, that Mphatso sat uheni (terribly). Noting the criticism and becoming aware of her aunt’s dissatisfaction, Mphatso quickly closed her legs and moved her right ankle over the left in order to close her spread-open legs. Seeing this change but still not satisfied with Mphatso’s seating posture, the aunt rose from the tree stump, picked up the girl and turned her around so that the food was positioned at the right side of her body (Figure 1.1).

Weeks later in a different village in the same region, I attended a church service and watched a choir perform a religious praise song and dance. In the Christian parts of Malawi, church services include dance and singing performances by groups organized according to participants’ age and gender. The choir that day included secondary school students wearing cleanly pressed school uniforms.

Figure 1.2 Pointing to God with right index fingers
In a well-rehearsed manner, the students sang the praise songs and when they reached *Ciuta*, the word for God, they pointed uniformly upward toward the sky with their right index fingers (Figure 1.2). I noticed that even when aTonga interacted outside the context of religious performances, they seemed to always use their right index fingers when making a visible reference to *Ciuta*.

As I spent more time in Nk̄ata Bay, I noticed that adults reprimand children who use the left hand to eat, write, or give and receive objects, even if they seemed to have a natural inclination for using the left hand. I first learned about left hand suppression during a meal with my colleagues at a local secondary school in Malawi. As I pinched a piece of *nsima* with my left hand—since my right had been covered in chalk dust—my colleagues appeared alarmed. They explained gently afterward that doing so could offend other diners at the table. After other similar explanations about the left hand taboo, I wondered to what extent does a prescriptive cultural norm like the left hand taboo influence the form and structure of visual-gestural expressions in everyday life? Is right hand preference enforced in all manual activities or only certain domains, such as at mealtime and during religious services? To answer these questions, I show in this dissertation that handedness is a domain-specific constraint among ciTonga speakers in lakeside Malawi by analyzing recordings
of their naturally occurring multimodal interactions. In what follows, I present the research aim and scope, relevant theoretical backgrounds, and dissertation synopsis.

1.1 Research Aim and Scope

The main thesis of my dissertation is: ciTonga speakers do not observe the left hand taboo in all interactive domains uniformly. Tonga folk ideology bans the use of the left hand in many activities, such as writing, eating, and greeting (Zverev 2006). However, people still interact with their left hands frequently. To understand this paradox, I aim to examine the boundaries of this prescriptive Tonga norm by comparing its use in two domains of spontaneous interactions.

Kinesic expressions are a key aspect of the multimodality in human sociality. In addition to their language-like functions in gesture, they also contribute to actions that imply what people are going to do, or illocutionary acts (Austin 1962). These two functions correspond to two types of domains in spontaneous interactions, where the natural use of symbolic signs is most apparent. All human interactions can be characterized as some form of ritual in the human behavioral sense (Goffman 1967; Huxley 1877). The term ritual refers to performances through which people display, embody, and contest social and moral values (Basso and Senft 2009:10). It encompasses “formal” ritual, including
pre-planned, structurally rigid, and socially serious events such as rites-of-passage (Irvine 1974); ritualized communication, comprising all human symbolic and linguistic behaviors; and everyday ritual, containing quotidian and routinized activities like eating and greeting (Enfield 2009:53). These different domains of interaction may be distinguished by the degrees of control over their performance structures, the degrees to which people can access and interact with contextual information, and the degrees of their actions’ illocutionary force (Basso and Senft 2009:18). Formal rituals often do not exhibit natural behaviors, their pre-planned and pre-established structures preclude them from my analysis. The domain of everyday rituals and ordinary talks have different functional and structural complexities (Table 1.1).

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<th><strong>Everyday Rituals</strong></th>
<th><strong>Ordinary Talks</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Function</strong></td>
<td>Reinforce social beliefs</td>
<td>Discourse, semantic content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure</strong></td>
<td>Mixture of movements</td>
<td>Movements follow parameters</td>
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Everyday rituals expose the structures of fundamental beliefs and practices known by all community members (Basso and Senft 2009) and often internalized as second nature and taken for granted (Bourdieu 1990:56). Within ritual communication, I focus on natural conversations imbedded in their context of
use, also known as talks. Talks occur in utterance adjacency pairs and obey many structural principles (Dingemanse, Torreira, and Enfield 2013; Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974; Stivers et al. 2009) and usually do not have a clear “goal” or “purpose” (but see Roberts 2004, 2012). In order to understand the patterns of communication within a group of people sharing linguistic and social practices, interactions should be distinguished by those that encourage to behavioral convergence from those that do not (Gumperz 1958).

1.2 Theoretical Framework

My theoretical interpretations rely on the understanding that the content and structure of situated communications exhibit local ideologies that in turn shape people’s use of symbolic signs (Gumperz 1982). To examine and compare the observance of the left hand taboo in the two domains of interaction, I summarize here the relevant theoretical frameworks that pertain to my study: social roots of left hand discrimination, context and implication, politeness, and multimodality.

1.2.1 Social Roots of Left Hand Discrimination

Handedness refers to the naturally occurring yet socially shaped inclination for using the right, left, or both hands in manual tasks. Many cultural
and religious narratives explain asymmetries in social and moral values by mapping them onto handedness asymmetry. For example, the Christian Passion narrative recounts how the thief crucified on the left hand of Jesus mocked Jesus and therefore failed to go to heaven, the one crucified on the right hand side acknowledged Christ and achieved salvation. Jesus is also seated at the right side of the Father when he ultimately ascends to heaven. This association between left and right and moral valency may be an example of symbolic classification inherent in human thought (Hertz 1977). As such, handedness asymmetry offers a natural metaphor for social dualisms, including the sacred and profane, good and evil, and birth and death. Lateral distinction “is very probably the product of representations which are religious, and therefore collective” (Durkheim 1964:12). In other words, hand preference is a collective preference for how people should conduct themselves physically in culturally patterned and habituated ways (Mauss 1973). In the 1970s, some Nuer societies in East Africa bound the left hands so that their functions are further disabled (Evans-Pritchard 1978). In many Muslim societies, there are strong social pressures against the use of the left hand in activities related to food preparation and consumption because the left hand is culturally recommended for “unclean” activities associated with personal hygienic functions. In Malawi, left-handers are believed to be “greedy people who cannot give to others,” since the right is the
designated hand for giving and receiving. Despite this anecdotal ideology discriminating against left hand use, negative perception toward footedness is absent in Malawi (Zverev and Mipando 2007). Many languages of diverse genetic affiliations prefer the right over the left in their lexical semantics. In Latin, left and right sides, *dextera* and *sinistra*, provide the roots for the English derivations, *dexterous* and *sinister*. In French, the two sides are also paired with positive and negative meanings: *droite* (right) also means “correct” and “straight”, while *gauche* (left) also means “awkward”. Among the Mapuche of central Chile, *piukeman* (pure in heart), includes the morpheme *man* (right), while *wesa lonko* (evil-headed) includes the morpheme *wele* (left) (Faron 1962). In Arabic, the right side, *yamîne*, is derived from the verb *yamana*, which is associated with ideas about prosperity, taking an oath, and blessing; the left hand, ‘*as’ar*, is derived from the verb ‘*asara*’, which is linked to tasks with arduous difficulty (Chelhod 1977). CiTonga also uses the word *kumazele* (left) to indicate “bad”, as in the admonition, “* фон вакита закумазеле*” [you have done left things]. The categorization of right as good and left as bad is far from universal, however. For instance, the Tenejapan society in southern Mexico does not distinguish abstract shapes that appear to be mirror images of each other, even though they cannot be juxtaposed on top of one another. They also do not use the right and left metaphor in symbolic aspects of society (Levinson and Brown
This observation shows that the symbolic classification of left and right is based on cultural-specific cognitive categorization. Societal norms often constrain handedness and may change preference through history. Many left-handed North Americans in the first half of the 20th century were restricted to write with their right hand, a practice no longer observed in the United States today.

Handedness in population distribution appears consistent across cultures, with right-handers being in the majority, at roughly 70-90 percent; left-handers in the minority, at 8-30 percent; and an even smaller minority of the population are ambidextral (Heny 2008; Perelle and Ehrman 1994). This distribution appears to be consistent through human history (Coren and Porac 1977), but primates and other animals do not exhibit any lateral preference similar to humans (Holder 2001), making the “innate” claim of handedness doubtful. People’s handedness does not refer to hand use of all physical tasks (Healey, Liederman, and Geschwind 1986). Activities that are independent from environmental influences—such as social imitation and education, and the designs of technical equipment and tools (Sattler 2003)—indicate a person’s true handedness. These environmentally independent activities may include throwing and catching a ball, sweeping, or cleaning (Steenhuis and Bryden 1989). Manual activities dependent on environmental influences may include opening a door.
(determined by the placement of the doorknob), using a screwdriver (generally designed for clockwise and right-handed motion), and writing (some adults making children use their right hand). Handedness determination may be further complicated by the fact that people have different preferences even within skilled activities. For example, a person may be a strong left-hander and prefers to use the left hand in a majority of one-handed activities, or the person may be a mild left-hander and use the left hand to write but the right hand to open soda cans (McManus and Mascie-Taylor 1979). People may perceive objects or concepts associated with their dominant hand as “good” and those associated with the non-dominant hand as “bad”. For instance, English-speaking right-handers tend to associate rightward space with positive ideas, but left-handers associate positivity with leftward space (Casasanto 2009; 2011). This polarized conceptualization cannot be attributed to linguistic experience, because only “right” is associated with positive ideas in the English language of both groups (Casasanto 2009; 2011).

The physiological and psychological origins of human handedness is still unclear. Even though left-handed children tend to have family members who are also left-handed, the fact that identical twins may have different handedness disproves lateralization as having purely genetic causes (McManus 2004). Neurological cross-lateralization—the physical alignment of the left hemisphere
to the right side of the body and vice versa—encourages some to associate physical lateralization to the hemispheric division of cognitive processing. Some studies have shown that as many as 30 percent of people are left-handed in a society but most still process language on the left hemisphere (Heny 2008). When people describe metaphorical entities—semantic concepts are processed in the right hemisphere—people tend to gesture with their left hand more regardless of their handedness (Kita, de Condappa, and Mohr 2007). Frequency to gesture with the right or left hand may therefore be related to the type of linguistic entity being processed. However, developmental studies show that fetuses that have not yet completed spinal cord development have asymmetrical manual movements in the womb, suggesting that handedness may be independent from cerebral lateralization (Hepper, Shahidullah, and White 1991). The discovery of neurological cross-lateralization may reinforce assumptions of left and right metaphors and deepen the supposed contrast of their functions (Corballis and Beale 1976). It may also obscure the observation of a society’s “real” lateral conceptualization because it assumes that the distinction is innate (Levinson and Brown 1994:14).

1.2.2 Context and Implication

determined social frameworks and cultural orientations of the people
using them (Bakhtin 1986; Gumperz 1992; Hymes 1986). Context also addresses how people interpret actions vis-à-vis other relevant understandings for a discourse, such as the content of prior conversations (Hanks 2005).

The norms and beliefs of an all-encompassing sociolinguistic environment are often too broad and abstract to be applied to actions of interactions in locally situated settings. Instead, actions should be interpreted as they are applied in particular events of speech (Jakobson 1960), which are in turn embedded in socioculturally framed understandings (Goffman 1986; Gumperz and Hymes 1972). Speaker-addressee dynamics within a speech-centered event form the basic context unit through which people exchange messages, project needs, and make comments on prior discourses. When people produce a message, they have a typical audience in mind (Bakhtin 1986:95) but are also affected by people who happen to be present (Bell 1984; Labov 1972b). People can project their views and establish their stance by interpreting what is happening within an event, including its content and structure (Kockelman 2005; Ochs 1996). For people to interpret each other correctly, they must also share common footing toward the overall norms and beliefs of the society that they are part of (Goffman 1981: Chapter 3). An example of this common understanding is taboo, the prohibition of socially offensive acts in order to maintain the symbolic organization of a social environment (Allan and Burridge 2006).
Messages exchanged during an interactive event may carry
text content, serve pragmatic functions, or suggest contextualization
cues that allow people to hint at or clarify what they actually mean; cues also help addressees in making appropriate inferences (Gumperz 1992). Implicature refers to the second message type, the pragmatic process by which people mean more, or less, than what they do (Grice 1989). It determines how people cooperate to exchange logical correspondences and may include four maxims: 

*quality*, tell the truth; *quality*, provide the suitable amount of information; *relevance*, stay relevant to the discourse; and *manner*, be clear (Grice 1989). People breach a maxim in order to infer to what they actually want to accomplish, and thereby produce an illocutionary act (Austin 1962). Societies have their own variant methods for making implicatures that may not correspond to Grice’s maxims (Keenan 1976). The desire to be polite (Grice 1989) and carry out a pleasant conversation (Lakoff 1973; Tannen 2005) also often overrule one more maxims.

Metapragmatics refers to the aspect of communicative competence that reflects people’s judgment of a behavior’s appropriateness (Silverstein 1981). It includes descriptions of the “correct” way of using an expression, specifications for the conditions and contexts in which certain expressions should be used, explicit (on-record) or implicit (off-record) meaning of what is happening
(Goffman 1959), and associations of an expression to larger social experiences. An inappropriate behavior from a competent member may surprise others who expect otherwise and, in turn, form evaluations and judgments about them. The more unexpected, or marked, an expression is, the more significant is the choice for producing it (Arndt and Janney 1987). Some expressions are easy for native speakers to evaluate, but many escape people’s awareness, even when researchers locate them and ask for comments. The challenges for articulating what people think about certain actions may lie in structural characteristics; actions that are not segmentable, continuous, nor iconic tend to be harder for a native speaker to interpret (Silverstein 1981). For example, aTonga make a curtsey-like posture when they approach and wish to speak to a group of people. This kinesic expression does not include segmentable components that form one-to-one correspondences with social meanings, and does not have any respectful meaning when produced in isolation without the group of people. The structural fluidity of the curtsey posture makes it difficult for people to explain exactly how it shows politeness. This opacity can often be clarified by the presence of one or more exterior factors that influence how an expression should be interpreted. These factors are often not overt nor stable and one cue may have one meaning in one context but a different meaning in another, such as prosodic modifications in the affectionate use of endearment registers (Gumperz 1982).
Contextualization cues can only be learned through deep immersion in the social networks in which they are used (Garrett and Baquedano-López 2002; Kulick and Schieffelin 2007).

When considering the context of communication, the largest scope is the speech community (Duranti 1988) that is generally defined as a group of people who interact frequently and share a set of norms and expectations regarding language use (Gumperz 1968; Labov 1972a). Even if people all speak the same language in the same geo-political location, they do not do so uniformly. The distribution of variations reflects how societies are structured (Gumperz 1968:383). However, membership to this community is not assumed but achieved through active participation (Irvine 2006). When people have more contact with those in the same community than they do with outsiders, they form “closed networks” that stabilize language uses; but when they have less overlap with internal members, they form “open networks” that foster linguistic change (Milroy and Milroy 1992). The boundary of a community is not permanent and its internal members form social ties of different intensities with each other and with people outside (Milroy and Milroy 1992). A group of people who mutually engage on a regular basis and share commitment and understanding toward the activity that ties them together is called a community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 2000). Members of a community of practice also share
interpretations of other communities’ behaviors and of their own ideologies (Eckert 2006). Members embody particular styles of practice that can be combined to create distinct social personae (Gal and Irvine 1995). Through time, these unique styles become conventionalized and eventually become the normative standards of behavior (Eckert 2006:683 referencing Lewis 1969).

1.2.3 Politeness

Politeness refers to normative beliefs about what constitutes an act as polite or rude, tactful or offensive. This intuitive knowledge is part of a person’s communicative competence (Hymes 1972) because it allows people to interact appropriately according to pragmatic rules situated within local social standards. Politeness is maintained by the “positive social value” that people wish for themselves and hope to give to others whom they interact with (Goffman 1967). This value is known as face, and what constitutes it is socially and culturally specific (Gu 1990; Ide 1989; Mao 1994; Matsumoto 1988; Nwoye 1992; Wierzbicka 1985) because it is a product of specific discursive historical developments (Bakhtin 1992; Wierzbicka 1991; 2006). Face is borrowed from the Chinese popular concept of mian zi (face, facial exterior) and its several derivations, including you mian zi (having and keeping face), gained through approval and appreciation from others (Brown and Levinson 1987); and mei mian zi (not having
and loosing face), due to embarrassment or shame from socially unapproved acts produced by oneself or others (Goffman 1967; Hu 1944). Face is maintained for oneself and given to others also through socially specific face-saving strategies (Arundale 2006; Goffman 1976). In Nkaciónata Bay, the strategies include a general rule for expressing deference toward elders, gender rules that require women to act deferentially toward men even those in marital relations, and context-specific rules for showing familiarity with your close friends and showing deference for strangers. Honorifics, or expressions of deference, can be understood in terms of Brown and Oilman’s (1960) two parameters of distance: “Power” distance depends on a particular culture’s social classifications—in Nkaciónata Bay they are seniority and patriarchy—that establish a superior-inferior relationship. “Solidarity” distance describes people’s intimacy or unfamiliarity with each other. People with similar social attributes (such as intimate friends or family members) have close solidarity distance and people with different social attributes (such as strangers) have wide solidarity distance. Brown and Oilman (1960) show that these different distances correspond to T- and V-forms of second person pronouns in many Indo-European languages, for example the *tu* and *vous* forms in French, and have different rules for how to use them. In the solidary parameter, intimates use the T-form and strangers use the V-form, and it is possible for people to use the two forms interchangeably.
However, in the power parameters, inferiors are obliged to use the V-form to superiors and superiors use the T-form. Brown and Oilman’s observation is applicable not only in spoken ciTonga—*iwe* for T-form and *imwe* for F-form—but can also be applied to understand the use of honorifics in ciTonga multimodal utterances. People’s ideologies regarding politeness, social ranking, and linguistic registers create stereotypes about others and their own identities, and stereotypes can influence the interpretation of actions that do not conform to them (Agha 1998).

### 1.2.4 Multimodality

Multimodal communication include the simultaneous use and interpretation of many types of detectable signs, including language, kinesics, dress, writing, and so on. Kinesics is the study of bodily movements including, eye gaze, head movement, body posture, and gesture (Birdwhistell 1952; 1970). People also organize their environment into socially meaningful zones, by managing interpersonal space and body orientation (Hall 1963), for instance.

Every society that has language has gesture, including sign language (Liddell and Metzger 1998; Liddell 2003). Children gesture at a young age and often before they learn to talk (Cochet and Vauclair 2010; Goodwyn, Acredolo, and Brown 2000; Pizzuto and Capobianco 2005). Structural phrases in languages
contain tightly coupled gestures and speech that are tightly coupled (Kita 1993; Kita and Özyürek 2003) and some argue that gesture is expressed by the speaker’s need to clarify speech (Nobe 1996). Gesture and speech may fall under the same governing principle (Kendon 1972; 1980; 1986; McNeill and Duncan 2000), and psychological origin (McNeill 1992; Vygotsky 1980). But because of their differences in meaning and use, kinesics and speech should be analyzed separately and differently (Key 1980). Traditional understanding of gestures limit them to only to movements in empty space (McNeill 2000, 2006), but movements used for handling objects should also be considered gestures (Streeck 2009). People communicate using practical actions when they display an object to highlights certain properties for the audience (Streeck 2006; 2009). For example, presenting a gift with two hands in Malawi shows that the giver values what is being given and wishes to please the receiver with this gift.

The form and production of gestures can be idiosyncratic, conventional, or somewhere in between. Gestures with conventionalized forms and meanings are called quotable gestures (more discussion in chapter 4). They have similar formal and semantic properties to lexical words and the articulatory details must be met in order for the utterances to deliver the intended meaning. Those produced spontaneously with improvised forms are called gesticulations (McNeill 1992); they can provide visual depictions of the referent or represent abstract concepts
and thought processes of the gesturer. The meaning of gesticulation is often opaque to addressees that do not have access to the verbal component. Such dependency on language has been used to compare different types of gestures, ranging on a continuum from most linguistically independent to least (McNeill 1992; 2000). However, many gestures do not have a fixed position on this continuum because their functions change depending on the linguistic and pragmatic context (Kendon 2008). For example, *zowala* (wedding) has the same use in ciTonga quotable gesture, the sign language used in Yavimba, and the real life practical action of throwing money during a celebration (Figure 1.3).

![Figure 1.3](image)

**Figure 1.3** *Zowala* is gesture, sign, and practical action

Gestures may be understood and classified by how they represent a referent in semiotic terms. In semiotics, a sign signifies a concept or meaning through acoustic and visual representations (de Saussure 1959). It forms symbolic, iconic, or indexical relationship with its referent (Pierce 1967): a *symbolic* sign represents a referent arbitrarily and must be learned; an *iconic* sign
resembles or imitates the referent by possessing some of its qualities; and an *indexical* sign forms a spatial or temporal connection with the referent.

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<td>BEAT</td>
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There are three gesture classification schemes in literature, summarized by Goldin-Meadow (2005:6) in a table adapted as Table 1.2 above. In all existing classifications, indexical signs correspond to deictic or pointing gestures that will be discussed in chapter 6. Iconic signs are also referred to as iconic (McNeill 1992), kinetographic, spatial movement, or pictographic gestures (Ekman and Friesen 1969). The bow and arrow depiction above is an example of iconic gesture. Symbolic signs correspond to metaphoric (McNeill 1992) or ideographic gestures (Ekman and Friesen 1969). The “sum up” gesture above is an example of such gesture. Krauss, Chen, and Gottesman (2000) group symbolic and iconic gesture signs into a lexical gesture category. This dissertation uses the classification terms of McNeill (1992). Both metaphoric and iconic gestures
provide visual representations of how people think about the referent so they have also been called “imagistic” gestures (de Ruiter 2007).

All classification schemes also include a group of gestures that do not signify a referent but instead offer a discourse function. These are known as *holophrastic* (Kendon 1981) or motor (Krauss, Chen, and Gottesman 2000) gestures. Some of these gestures preview the type of talk that a speaker will engage in once a turn is granted (Streeck and Hartage 1992). There are others that cross-reference the content of a current utterance to the theme of the conversation (Brookes 2005), such as indicating one person’s understanding of another’s contribution, or by managing turn distribution in a conversation (Bavelas et al. 1995; Kendon 1972; McNeill 1992). People can also gesture to make a plea to their audience or to signal that they are about to present critical topics (Kendon 1995). Beat (McNeill 1992) or baton (Ekman and Friesen 1969) form a subgroup of holophrastic gestures that mark discourse rhythms. They highlight itemized ideas or stress important topics in a discourse by repeating uncomplicated motions of the same form.

A description on the structural patterns of language and extralinguistic modes allow people to observe and specify possible constraints for their use (Ladefoged 1975). The parameters for the visual-gestural modality include handshape, movement, location, and non-manual behaviors (Kendon 2004;
Stokoe 2005). Gestures can represent different objects and perform different functions because of their articulators’ ability to alter features in the gesture parameter (Calbris 1990; Grice 1975). *Handshape* describes the how the fingers and joints form particular shapes and appears more categorical than other parameters (Brentari 1998; Sandler 1989). A basic description of the handshape of a gesture will identify the hand articulating the gesture (right, left, or both); and the fingers carrying out the action (thumb, index, middle, ring, or little finger). *Non-manual behaviors* refer to the properties of the face and body, such as movements of the mouth, neck, nose, eyes, eyebrows, and body posture. *Movement* details how and where articulators move in space, for example, whether or not the handshape is involved in additional motions such as twisting, jerking, or repetition of the movement.

![Supine and Prone Skeletal Structures](image)

**Figure 1.4** Supine and prone skeletal structures
Orientation of the hands specifies the direction of the articulator relative to the place of articulation, but this parameter is no longer emphasized as the wrist movement in manual utterance largely controls it (Kendon 2004). The two main orientations of the hand and arm are prone and supine, referring to the skeletal position of the forearm (Figure 1.4). Prone features the radius bone crossing over the ulna. This is in contrast with the supination where the two bones do not cross. Location identifies where articulation occurs. The space where people gesture and sign can be roughly divided into four descriptive regions: center, periphery, extreme periphery, and back, as shown in Figure 1.5 (adapted from McNeil 1992, 2005).

![Diagram of gesture plane]

**Figure 1.5 Regions of the front gesture plane**

The center region is in front of the chest and is where people most often gesture. The periphery region refers to anywhere around the shoulders or the
area immediately outside the center region. The extreme periphery region refers to the area outside the shoulders. The back region refers to the area behind the head of the gesturer. Gesturing in the back plane may occur when a speaker applies more effort in their gesture to show emphasis.

Gesture includes a series of movements that begin at a resting position, transfer to a visible location with a prominent action, and then dissolve into the next gesture or return to a resting position. A completion of these three states is called a gesture phrase (Kendon 2004; Kita, van Gijn, and van der Hulst 1998). Within a gesture phrase, the movement and motion that take place before the articulator reaches the target location is called the preparation. This is the part where people raise their limbs toward the place of articulation. The movement typically produced with the strongest physical effort and at the target place of articulation is called a gesture stroke. The stroke tends to synchronize with the co-expressed speech. Though it sometimes begins before speech, it never occurs after it (Kendon 1972). Most illustrations in my dissertation capture the stroke segment of a gesture phrase because people perform the most distinguishable configuration during it. People often also hold the stroke as they think about what to say next. The relaxing motion where the articulator is moved back to the resting position is called the recovery. To complete a single idea, people often produce multiple strokes and accompanying recoveries. A sum of all actions,
including spoken components, necessary for meaning production is called a gesture unit (Kendon 2004:Chapter 7).

How someone gestures adds descriptive detail to what is spoken and reveals their understanding of the concept. For example, a child whose gesture mis-matches speech tend to have a deeper understanding of the concept than those that do not show mis-match (Goldin-Meadow 2003). Gesture forms are likely to be shaped during socialization in childhood (Haviland 2000; De León 2008). For example, Bantu speakers in South Africa require their children to describe and gesture more than parents speaking Indo-European languages (Kunene 2010). Male Zulu children tend to use a larger gesture space than female children of the same age (Kunene 2010). This difference is attributed to the different cultural expectations of linguistic performance for male and female children (Kunene 2010). In South Africa, excessive gesturing that takes up a large space is considered disrespectful so people only gesture a lot when they are among their peers (Brookes 2014b). Particular sociocultural ecologies also affect how people gesture. For example, immigrants’ to New York City perform gesture frequencies and sizes that fit the preferences of their own cultural heritages (Efron 1972). Neapolitans gesture more possibly because of their crowded living space (Kendon 2004). The repertoire of urban gestures in South Africa changes constantly to reflect the covert prestige of slang terms:
membership in urban youth culture is maintained by knowing the
newest gestures and how to use them cleverly (Brookes 2004).

1.3 Dissertation Synopsis

This dissertation is organized as follows: In chapter 2, I describe my
methodology and analysis used to interpret handedness in multimodal
interactions. In chapter 3, I describe the ciTonga speech community by providing
its ethnographic and formal linguistic accounts. In chapter 4, I present the
observance of left hand taboo in three types of everyday rituals. In chapters 5
and 6, I examine the significance of handedness in two types of gestures common
in ordinary talks: quotable gestures with conventionalized form and meaning,
and pointing gestures often with less convention. I conclude findings of the
dissertation and future research considerations in chapter 7. In the dissertation,
drawings listed as “illustrations” are intended to represent gestures that form the
basis of ciTonga gesture repertoire, all other pictures are aids to the dissertation
narrative and are labeled as “figure”.
2 Methodology

My analysis is based on recording of naturally occurring multimodal interactions in Cifila and Kavuzi, including Capongolela, Camawoya, Kasambala, Yavimba, and Mphande villages (Figure 2.1).

![Figure 2.1 Kavuzi households](image)

I participated in many aspects of Tonga living and social activities, and acquired ciTonga competence during my stay in Cifila from December 2006 to January 2009, when I shared a home with a female Tonga elder and taught at the local secondary school. During my pilot study from May to August 2010, I
recruited research assistants and participants, and collected preliminary data in both Cifila and Kavuzi. I returned to complete data collection from May to August 2012. Both field trips took place in the cold and dry season, when people generally take a break from farming duties.

2.1 Participants

Participants in this study were mostly adults with children and are members of extended families sharing a housing compound (Mphande 2014). As speakers of ciTonga in two locations in Nkata Bay, they broadly formed a “ciTonga speech community” with shared behavioral norms and expectations. In addition, each housing compound contained its own communities of practice, because people mutually engaged in social and domestic activities in it. Each compound also included sub-communities of practice, such as gender-segregated work spaces that will be discussed in section 3.2.1. I worked closely with two local assistants, one a man and one a woman, in both Cifila and Kavuzi to carry out data collection. I chose the two in Cifila because I worked and interacted with them frequently from 2006-2009. I chose the female assistant in Kavuzi because she was the mother of a close friend and because of her strong knowledge of Tonga cultural norms. The male assistant was the oldest son of the Capongolela chief, whom I identified through a friend-of-friend method (Milroy and Gordon
2003). All were multilingual in English, ciTonga, and ciNyanja or ciTumbuka. They often explained the reason for my presence to others in the village and escorted me to different hamlets for data collection. The hamlets were chosen based on the recommendations of local chiefs, and often were their own hamlets. People were generally selected based on their willingness and availability to participate. I aimed to recruit equal numbers of men and women, but since many activities in Tonga society are gender-divided, it was easier for me to interact and collect information from women. In Cifila, four men and eight women contributed directly to the study; in Kavuzi, 17 men, 21 women, and six children from six hamlets contributed.

2.2 Data Collection

I focused on collecting many informal situations that have no explicit or pre-determined goals because spontaneous interactions are in situ contexts for unconstrained multimodal interactions and allow the investigation of natural language mechanics (Enfield et al. 2007). Since my sheer presence disturbed people’s normal activities (Labov 1972a), I carried the camera at all the time so that people associated me with the camera. For me, this method worked better than setting up a tripod—which I did during the pilot study—because it allowed me to follow people as they move around the hamlet. I often observed through
participation (Meyerhoff et al. 2012) because it allowed me to witness
different types of activities in addition to the hospitality rituals people performed
for me. In addition, a larger range of topics and genres were more likely to evoke
different types of gestures (Seyfeddinipur 2012). Instead of “looking for”
multimodal interactions, I recorded whenever possible and collected a large
amount of footage. I reviewed all footage and selected interactions containing
multimodal interactions, specifically body movements for everyday rituals and
ordinary talk. I focused on greeting, leave-taking, giving/receiving, and eating
activities. For the latter, I focused on quotable gestures that have repeated
production and pointing gestures in four interactions that represented different
participant structures: instructions to me by one or two people, a dyad
conversation, and an interaction of more than four people.

During the 2010 pilot study, I collected one paper notebook of linguistic
field notes, over 15 hours of video recordings from three hamlets, and 16 digital
entries of ethnographic notes. Unfortunately, the paper field notes and all but
two video recordings were lost to two separate burglaries in Cifila and so they
were not included in my analysis. As a result, I changed to a second site in
Kavuzi, the home village of a close friend who lives in Mzuzu. During this
second field season in 2012, I visited a different hamlet everyday, five days a
week, for eight weeks. I returned to Mzuzu at dusk to upload video files and
recharged two camera batteries used during the day. I first visited my friend’s mother of the Mpande hamlet, and through her, I met other people and asked if I could visit their homes for my research. Everyone I encountered welcomed my visit. After my sixth hamlet, I stopped seeking new suites so that I could establish familiarity with the contacts that I had already made and help people become comfortable with me. In 2012, I collected two paper field notebooks, 30 digital entries of ethnographic field notes, transcription and translation for 15 interactions, and approximately 50 hours of recordings containing multimodal interactions.

2.3 Analysis

I paid attention to multimodal utterances including facial expressions, eye gaze (Goodwin 1980; 1981; Kendon 1967; Streeck 1993), head and body movements (Birdwhistell 1952; McClave 2000), body postures (Dosso and Whishaw 2012; Goffman 1956; Schefflen 1964), gestures (e.g. Kendon 1975b; 1980; 1997; 2004; Kita 1997; McNeill 1992), and body placements (Hall 1963; 1968), such as seating arrangements (Bricker 1978; Bunzel 1953; Enfield 2009).

For everyday ritual, I first noted examples of each type that were described as canonical forms by native speakers. I then identified variant forms and examined the context of their performance. For identified quotable gestures, I
noted their handshape, movement, and location (Kendon 2004; Kendon and Versante 2003; McNeill 2005), and identified their use and meaning through informal elicitation and folk definition (Dingemanse 2010, in press). Since people produced a vast number of pointing gestures, I examined their performance in four types of conversations containing participants of different genders. In addition to noting their forms, for pragmatic analysis, I also decided whether a gesture was “big” or “small” in size (Enfield, Kita, and de Ruiter 2007).

With native speaker consultants, I transcribed eight interactions and informally defined the meaning of gestures in Malawí in order to note maximum communication details that took place (Margetts and Margetts 2012; Sanders 2013). Once I returned from fieldwork, I continued to carry out informal interviews with local informants using social networking platforms, such as Facebook, to obtain metapragmatic information. For clarity of presentation and anonymity, I chose to show examples in line drawings. I chose to represent instances of multimodal performance with the clearest recording quality and embedded in a rich contextual environment, where people actively participated in the conversation. Native speakers verified the function of the gestures and provided ciTonga and English glosses for them. I illustrated 103 gestures and compared the interactive contexts of similar gestures to identify their function and generate hypotheses for why certain structures are used in particular ways.
3 Ethnographic and Linguistic Backgrounds

CiTonga multimodal interactions are imbedded within sociocultural and linguistic environments of lakeside Malawi, so they must be observed with an understanding of these settings (Kendon 2004). I present them in four parts: First, I describe the Nkhata Bay landscape, major Tonga historical events, and day-to-day social activities, including norms for body comportment. Second, I outline the structure of ciTonga phonetics, phonology, morphology, and syntax of the oral-auditory medium. Third, I present preliminary understandings of Malawian Sign Language and its use in the homesign environment. Finally, I explain the parameters by which I describe visual-gestural expressions, and show how gestures are classified in structurally and semiotic terms.

Malawi is a landlocked country of approximately 17 million inhabitants (National Statistical Office and ICF Macro 2011), with sovereignty over 118,484 km², of which 24,404 km² are covered by the waters of Lake Malawi. The country is situated south of Tanzania, between Mozambique to the east and south, and Zambia to the west.
Malaŵi has three geographical regions and 27 governmental districts (Figure 3.1 adapted from United Nations (2004)). Nḳhata Bay and five other districts are located in the Northern Region. Nine districts, including the capital city, Lilongwe, are located in the Central Region. The Southern Region is the largest, with 13 districts, including Blantyre, the business capital of the country, and Zomba, the old colonial capital.
Nk'bata Bay experiences three seasons; these include periods of cold and dry, cipwepwe, from May through August, hot and dry, cihanya, from September through November, and hot and raining, cifuku, from December through April. Farmers till the soil and plant the crops in cifuku; the later part of the season is known as the “hungry season” because many families have exhausted stored crops from the previous year and do not have any new crops to consume at this time. Harvesting takes place from the end of cipwepwe through cihanya, until the first rain. After completing farming duties, people carry out other activities such as weaving or roofing. Most aTonga reside on the lakeshore landform that includes dambo (valleys), pili (hillsides), and nyanja (lakeshore) (Reynolds 2006).

Cifila comprises a long strip of flat land, around 15 kilometers, on the western coast of the Lake, while Kavuzi is situated in the hilly areas of the Kanininga Forest Reserve. There is a significant difference in population concentration between the densely populated lakeshore and the less populated hilly areas (Van Velsen 1964). Housing clusters are farther apart in the hilly areas and sometimes people will not see anyone from outside of the family for days at a time. There is one major national tarmac road that connects villages in Nk'bata Bay, the M5, built in the 1980s. The tarmac roadside is a popular space for many social activities.
3.1 History

The Tonga society as we know it today began in the 18th century, when a group of people separated from aTumbuka in Mzimba and settled along the lakeshore (Mazibuko et al. 2007; Van Velsen 1959). Due to the shortage of arable land there, a group known as aTonga spread out to different parts of Nk’ata Bay in at least four clusters: Nyaliwanga Tonga, Kabunduli (Phiri), Kapunda Banda, and Mank’ambira and Kang’oma group. Figure 3.2 shows the location of four clusters and Ciweyo, the village headquarter of Cifila (Van Velsen 1964).

![Historical map of Tonga clusters](image-url)
Nyaliwanga Tonga are speculated to be the oldest inhabitants of Nkata Bay, their home base is around Mpamba (Mphande 2014). They defeated the invading Ngoni in 1875 in a battle called *Lwana Tonga* (Tonga victory) (McCracken 2008). Kabunduli people are speculated to have originated in the hilly areas—*pili* means “mountain”—but later expanded toward the west and north of Luweya River. Kapunda Banda people settled south of Luweya on the lakeshore and have been speculated to be an offshoot of aNyanja from the south. Mankambila and Kang’oma are believed to come from the Mozambican side of the lake. Current Tonga political divisions all stem from dispute a between the Kabunduli and Kapunda Banda clans (Van Velsen 1964).

Some believe that aTonga have an “extraordinary” ability to accept and integrate foreign customs (Mphande 2014:53). ATonga first came in contact with the Europeans during David Livingston’s religious mission. During the British colonial era, aTonga worked, in large numbers, in the mining industries of Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa (Van Velsen 1960). Many returned with new domestic goods and garments that allowed technical innovations (Nakayama 2008). Because of this cross-cultural interaction, many loanwords were incorporated into the ciTonga lexicon such as *buluku* from Afrikaans *broek* [bruk] (trousers), and *mbatatesi* from Arabic *batatishi* (potatoes) (Mkochi n.d.).
In the mid- to late-19th century, the Ngoni occupied Nkhwata Bay and captured and enslaved many aTonga (Douglas 1950; Young 1933). After the invasion of this patrilineal tribe, the originally matrilineal aTonga adopted the practice of paying cattle or cash for bride-wealth (Douglas 1950). Many ciTonga surnames, such as Mpande and Banda, come from the ciNgoni or ciNyanja languages suggesting intermarriages. The female-dominant social structure shifted during this period of labor migration (Van Velsen 1960), because at that time money earned abroad remained with the husband’s family, while the wife resided virilocally (Lovett 1997). This made women dependents of their husbands’ remittances in their husbands’ homes (Lovett 1997). Remnants of the traditional matrilineal system are present in the power transfer of chiefs.

Tonga history and morals are transferred to children and young adults through the form of oral narratives, as is in many African societies (Gyekye 2011). Their performance combines multiple modalities, including the vivid use of ideophones (Banda 2006), facial and manual gestures (Banda 2006), and imitation of animals and people (Mvula 1978). Their structures include marked opening and closing formulae that elicit audience participation (Mvula 1978). There are three types of Malawian oral narratives: transparent performances without metaphors, performances containing metaphors (ndawi), and performances that depend on other nth’anus (folktales) (Gray 1944; MacDolad
Oral narrative performers are often trained since childhood and good performers receive respect and gain prestige from the society (Banda 2006; Mvula 1978). There are documentations of Malaŵian oral tradition in ciTonga (MacAlpine 1906b; 1906a; Mphande 2000; 2006), ciNgoni (Ott 2007), ciNyanja (Chimombo 1988; Gray 1944; Kambalame et al. 2008; Rattray and Hetherwick 2010), ciTumbuka (Banda 2006; Shawa and Soko 2007), and ciYao (MacDonald 1882) communities.

3.2 Society

Tonga villages are comprised of tight clusters of dwellings. Each house (nyumba) contains a single nuclear family (banja) and a cluster of nyumba form a hamlet (muzi). The word muzi literally means “village,” but has many lexical meanings: it can refer to villages of various sizes (a hamlet is considered a small village and many hamlets are considered a large village), a demarcated geo-political area (such as Cifila and Kavuzi), the rural area in contrast with the urban (boma), and someone’s “hometown”. ATonga do not have a central source of power in their social and political structure, instead, power is distributed on a small scale (Douglas 1950; Young 1933). A muzi is headed by a chief (ufumu), a term that also has fluid definitions, it refers to someone who has leadership over different units of society: he or she can be the head of the family, the village
headman (overlooking several hamlets), a group village headman (overlooking village headman), or the traditional authority (overlooking group village headmen). *Ufumu* preside over the village at large, but the head of the family is usually the one in charge of the immediate compound. Social ranking within a family is established through seniority and gender (Gilman 2011; Lovett 1997; MacAlpine 1906; Van Velson 1964). Since hamlets make up villages, many villagers are distantly related. In fact, aTonga prefer to call neighbors *abali* (relatives) over the actual word *azengizgani* (neighbor).

### 3.2.1 Domestic Space

The village layout puts people in close contact and provides them opportunities to observe and evaluate each other’s daily activities, for example their annual harvests, neighbors’ religious denominations, children’s characters and social conducts. It also made it easy to announce my presence when conducting fieldwork. Tonga homes typically include a main living building (*nyumba*), kitchen (*pakati*) and dish rack *citantali*, latrine (*cimbuzi*), designated outside space for social engagements (*pakondi* or *mp'ala*), and a small garden (*dimba*). Families set up *dimba* next to their hamlet for cassava, sweet potatoes, or okra, depending on the physical geography of the village, and keep a larger garden on family-owned or chief-assigned properties elsewhere. Traditionally,
*Nyumba* are built with mud bricks in a cylindrical shape, but rectangular layouts have become more popular, influenced by colonial style houses (Holtzman 2009). The presence of tin roofing, instead of thatch, often indicates a well-to-do economic status of the family. A *nyumba* is typically no more than 15 feet wide and include one or two bedrooms, a storage space, and a living room.

The main space of interaction is not in the *nyuma* but in gender-divided outdoor spaces used by everyone in the *muzi* (Chipeta 2004; 2005). The area for men of all ages and generations is called *mpala*, typically located under a designated tree or simple shelter. *Mpala* also means “court”, where men in the village come together to make decisions about community problems such as funerals or divorces (Van Velsen 1964). In the *mpala* men mend fishnets, weave baskets, or play games such as *bawo*, a mathematics-based game that aims to collect contestants’ pebbles (Mazibuko et al. 2007:53–54) or *ncuwa* (draughts). The spaces where women spend their time include *paduli* (the place for pounding grains), *pakati* (kitchen), where they carry out many household chores such as food preparation, laundry, or making clay pots. It is also the space for women to voice their opinions anonymously. For example, they can express complaints in the form of song and sing it while pounding grains into flour for cooking (Mvula 1986). One of the central functions of *mpala* and *paduli* is for educating and disciplining children so that they learn the moral values and folk traditions of the
community (Gray 1944). Many ethnographies note the significance of spatial organization in everyday activities. For instance, the sitting arrangement in Laos reflects the social hierarchy of a family (Enfield 2004). Mesoamerican ethnographies have also noted the social dimension of seating arrangements (cf. Bricker 1978 on Chiapas; Bunzel 1953 on Chichicastenango). In Nḳhata Bay, where people sit and what they sit on have strong social implications. In fact, bringing a chair or a mat for the visitor is an essential aspect of the Tonga access ritual (as in Ghana (Ameka 2009). Every households have usually a couple larger chief chair (mp̣andu) for the male head of the family and a few smaller stools (cipuna) (Mazibuko et al. 2007:130). One day, I asked people in Capongolela details about the Tonga greeting ritual. They performed an impromptu drama to show the Tonga social significance of chair (mpandu) choice and placement because dramas are popular ways to demonstrate cultural values (Kamlongera 1989). They showed two styles of chair giving that reflected the social relationships between hosts and visitors. A visitor with far solidarity distance from the host will sit in the best chair of the house, placed at a distance from the host’s chair. The quality of the chair shows the hosts’ respect for the visitor and the distance allows the visitor to “feel more at ease”. The sitting arrangement is quite different when neighbors or intimate friends
visit, who have a close solidarity distance with the host. In this situation, a host will not make overt efforts to offer a chair because a friend is flexible to sit anywhere and knows that sitting close to the host shows intimacy. Yet another arrangement takes place when a woman visits her friends. In this situation, the people sitting down on mats (mpasa) will arrange themselves so that they make room for the newcomer. To maintain respect for the opposite gender, male visitors do not sit on mpasa because they are reserved for women of the household. When there is nothing to sit on, a Tonga man will find any object that serves as a barrier between his body and the ground—for example, the protruding roots of a larger tree, brick, or rock. The choice of the chair and the distance between participants are other ways to show social relationship and politeness in ciTonga.

The staple food of Malawians is a thick porridge called nsima. Depending on the region, nsima can be made from maize flour, as in the inland areas; millet flour, as it is common in the extreme north; or cassava flour, common in lakeside Nkata Bay. Making flour from cassava is the job of women and includes peeling, fermenting in water to lower the cyanogen level of the tuber, and drying (Saka 1996). Nsimakondoole made from cassava is called kondoole. It is served with a relish or dende (side dish) that consists of legumes, but on special occasions may contain eggs, fish, or meat; and a vegetable dish, usually pumpkin or cassava leaves. In
general, consumption of animal protein is low, even when compared to other countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Reynolds 2006), suggesting that there are few households that own animals and consumers have little purchasing power (Reynolds 2006). In a hamlet, younger women take turns to prepare the meal. The chef rations the food into individually sized portions or makes a large ball of kondoole and puts it in the middle of the dining space for everyone to share. Once the food is made, a girl will bring the food to the paduli and a young boy will bring the food to mpala. After food is arranged on the ground or on a mpasa, a woman or a young boy hands the washbasin to the most honored person in the group, either the most senior member, or an honored guest, out of respect for them since the first person to use the basin gets the cleanest water. If there is a person unfamiliar to the rest of the group, such as a visitor, the child will take the basin back and bring it to the next person to wash hands. If everyone belongs to the same hamlet or frequently dines together, the basin will be passed on to whomever is next in line to wash their hands. The water of the hand washbasin may be cold or warm, depending on the availability of the cook or the demands of other family members.

The eating process in Malawí includes multiple sensory registers. “Tasting” involves a combination of sensory perceptions, including how the food appeals to the eyes, noses, hands, and ears (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1999). Many
ciTonga informants suggest to me that they can “taste” the quality of the nsima before it goes into their mouths, sensing the warmth of the nsima, kneading it to test its texture, and forming and re-forming the nsima so that it can soak up the soup of the dende without dropping bits into the common dende bowl.

3.2.2 Beliefs

The Tonga religious belief system is a syncretism of Christianity and local beliefs (Mphande 2006), including the belief in mzimu (ancestral spirits), spirit-possession, and consultation with mcimi (soothsayers) (MacAlpine 1906b). ATonga were the first Malawian ethnic group to identify themselves with the Christian faith due to strong and prolonged contact with Western style education through Scottish missions (Mphande 2014), such as the Bandawê Mission located about ten kilometers north of Cifila. Some believe that there are parallels between Tonga and Biblical theological traditions (Mphande 2000; 2006). The proverb “Ciuta âamt’o” [God has taken him] captures the belief that Ciuta (God) is the source for life and when people die, they go back to him.

The ability to live in unison with others is a greatly valued behavior for aTonga. People have a “rightful” place and role in the village, determined by their gender and age (Mphande 2014). Because people value cooperation and interdependence, many scorn individualism and selfishness. As such,
community-wide celebrations such as funerals, births, weddings, and
other social activities are open to all. The following proverbs suggest the
importance of living in harmony with others (Mphande 2014:59):

(1) *Muti wampala ngawakoleyanako.*
‘You need to help your friend by carrying a log for the fire at the mpala.’

(2) *Ucembele nkugelana.*
‘Solidarity is when you eat from the same plate.’

These proverbs suggest that assisting each other and sharing resources are
key ways to maintain one’s wellbeing. They also exemplify a common African
doctrine of *humanism*, a social guideline that considers fellow human wellbeing
as fundamental (Gyekye 2011). As captured in the proverb (1), the warmth from
fire in the *mpala* depends on firewood brought by friends; in other words, a
person’s and a group’s wellbeing depends on the contribution of others.

Sometimes Tonga girls go through a rite to adulthood called *cinamwali*, a
practice that originated from ciNyanja speakers south of Nkata Bay (Longwe
2008). However, many Tonga have told me that the practices take children away
from school and are no longer mainstream. Through intermarriage with the
Ngoni, many people observe the practice of *in-law avoidance* (Dixon 1972;
Haviland 1979; Treis 2005). In this practice, non-spousal relatives related through
marriage avoid seeing and being seen by each other (Mphande 2004).

They will go to great lengths to observe this practice: I once witnessed a woman hiding behind a bush for over 20 minutes as her brother-in-law chatted with a visitor at the courtyard of her home.

### 3.2.3 Kinesic Norms

Visible actions are tightly woven with local knowledge and ideas about body comportment (Mauss 1973), that shows respect for traditional moral values. Humanity’s embodied physical activity of the world is crucial for understanding human society (Merleau-Ponty 1962). Malawian performances, like other performances in Africa, are sometimes difficult to reduce into their component parts for analysis. Singing, playing musical instruments, dancing, masquerading, and dramatizing are considered elements in the same conceptual package (Stone 1998). I will illustrate three examples of that exhibit these ideas. Dance is a collective activity in secular and sacred gatherings and there are at least 61 types of traditional dances (Mazibuko et al. 2007) for various ethnic groups (Gilman 2011). Sacred dances typically aim to change someone else’s state of being, such as making them ill, tell the truth, or fall in love (Soko 2002). They include public performances by sinanga (herbalists) and ufwiti (witchdoctors), as well as private events that only permitted members may attend, such as certain
*gule wamkulu* (big dance) rituals common in the Central and Southern Regions. Secular dances include political performances that encourage victory candidates (Gilman 2011), performances at weddings and parties, and seasonal performances during inter-village competitions. In Nk’ata Bay, dances are public performances with a centralized situational focus that draw people’s attention to a common focused activity (Irvine 1979:786). Dances in Nk’ata Bay are classified by the social identities of the dancers, such as their age and gender (Kamlongera et al. 1992). Performances in Christian religious services are viewed differently from the sacred dances (Henderson and Gilman 2004).

Many Tonga men participate in the rehearsal and performance of the secular dance *malipenga* in *cihanya*. As a formal event, its expressive components, like dress and voice; situation, time and place of performance; and performers’ social category (Irvine 1979) have rigid structure and rules that display respect for the normative social order (Bloch 1975). Originally the dance is performed during inter-village competitions, but today many performers are paid to fulfill the demands of political rallies and tourist venues (Gilman 2000; Kamlongera 1986; Kerr 1989). The dance’s codes—signs for consistent reference in a designated moment (Eco 1976)—stem from Western military regiments of World War I. *Malipenga* means “trumpets,” referencing military instruments. After the war, many Tonga veterans emulated the physical training that they received
during their service, including the use of military terminology in daily
speech (Mpata 2001) and the incorporation of military style of dress, music, and
choreography (Kamlongera 1986) in social performances. Each group has its own
boma, or government, that references colonial political structures (Mpata 2001).

Malipenga dancers wear clean and ironed white shirts and khakis, the “soldiers”
perfect each “smart and careful” move with “strength and force” to show their
discipline in training and commitment to the boma (Mpata 2001:26). Dancers
move in controlled and intricate motions so as not to exhibit any unnecessary
movements. According to one dancer from Cifila, the most skillful dancer will
not lift any dirt off the ground, even though most performances take place on
earthen grounds. There is even a nurse in the troupe who removes sweat off the
dancers during a performance with a handkerchief (Kamlongera 1986). One
troupe performs after the other and the performance that wins the loudest cheers
from the audience wins the competition. A good dancer earns high esteem in
Nkata Bay. The borrowed practices of malipenga were employed for particular
tangible and intangible local benefits (Ranger 1975). Women’s cilimika (year)
dance is performed exclusively by girls that are not yet of marriageable age. The
appropriateness of the dance movements are monitored by male village elders.

Ciwoda dance involves women singing and dancing in a circle (Chilivumbo 1971).
The name of the dance is a loanword from English order, referring to women who
were “ordered” to Zimbabwe to work on labor compounds (Makibuko et al. 2007:35-36). Unlike the prestige accorded to malipenga dancers, women who perform ciwoda publicly are often labeled as “loose” (Chitauro, Dube, and Gunner 1994: 112; Gilman and Fenn 2006). Many husbands and family members restrict participation to political rallies (Gilman 2011), so some women resume ciwoda dancing after their divorces (Gilman 2011). The social standards for women in traditional Anglo-European societies also restrict them from moving their bodies freely to their full capacity so that they may appear less powerful and competent (Young 1980). Sexual interpretations are part of a culture’s gender codes that regulate peoples’ perception of which bodily parts or zones are erogenous (Foucault 1990). Malawians believe that women are responsible for preventing sexual gazes and other advances by men (Gilman and Fenn 2006).

Outside the domain of performances, people also restrict and minimize body movements to show respect. The left image from Figure 3.4 shows a man from Kavuzi addressing a group of elders who wished to learn about the public services of a religious organization. The speaker maintained a humble posture so that he did not appear at ease in front of elders. He spoke while keeping his hands stacked one on top of the other with the fingers tightly interlaced to prevent them from unnecessary movements. The only noticeable movements were the up and down motions of his left fingers enclosed by the right.
In contrast, the image on the right shows a school administrator in Kavuzi who did not minimize gesture movements when addressing a group of women who used his classroom space for a fundraiser. Unlike the previous speaker, this man gestured with his arms fully extended as he spoke. The movements suggested his comfort with the audience and his higher social position as a male administrator did not require him to show the same amount of deference as the previous example. Sometimes people imitated and showed me deferential comportment of young men by casting gaze aside, tugging hands between the thighs, and raising shoulders tightly to cave in the back. When adults address a group of sitters, they will bend to form a bowing posture, just as in Benin (Schottman 1995) and South Africa (Brookes 2014b).
I observed a woman in Kasambala bending over, putting her hands on knees, while listening for instructions (Figure 3.4). Elders are exempt from this norm and often have younger family members to represent them if they have an announcement. Boys are expected to assume a genuflecting posture and girls to kneel with both knees on the ground when they address adults. As a school teacher, my colleagues frequently disciplined pupils who did not kneel or genuflect when addressing teachers. The Gonja in Ghana also carry out similar abasement gestures that include the removal of hats, crouching, kneeling, clapping hands, and lying down on the left side for men and right side for women (Goody 2004). Proper comportment when interacting and dining with elders is described in a ciTonga idiom (Mphande 2006:76):

(3) *Ku-jikam-a, u-ly-engi ka-n'tu nei ñala ku-soka u-w-engi ñaka.*

15-kneel-FV, 2SG-eat-DFUT13-thing CONJ 2.elder 15-stand 2SG-hear-DFUT only
‘Kneeling you eat with elders, keep standing and you eat nothing.’
The idiom suggests that if people wish to partake in adult activities, they must approach the group from a lower physical stance, minimizing their presence to not disturb others who are sitting down. As a sign of modesty, woman sit with their legs extending straight out on mats laid on the ground forming an L-shaped body configuration, one ankle crossing on top of the other (Figure 3.5).

![Figure 3.5 The polite sitting posture for Tonga women](image)

It allows Tonga women to modestly cover up their legs—since thighs are considered an adult’s private parts. Girls are instructed at a young age to sit in the same manner (see section 4.3). There is a large contrast between the sitting posture of women in formal situations and in relaxed atmospheres. In casual settings and in the company of close female companions—women sit like men with their legs parted, on chairs and stools or simply squat. Social meaning attached to kinesic expression changes depending on the interactive situation
and context, and the interacting participants’ age, gender, and other social identities (Agha 1998). In closeknit communities, body comportment not only reflects people’s moral character but also the quality of their family upbringing. It is part of the Tonga metapragmatic competence.

3.3 CiTonga

Malawi is linguistically heterogeneous with about fifteen languages spoken within its borders (National Statistical Office and ICF Macro 2011). There are 16 living languages in Malawi, three are institutional, English, ciNyanja, and ciTumbuka; six are developing, including ciTonga; and seven are vigorous (Lewis, Simons, and Fenning 2015). Hastings Kamuzu Banda, then Life President of Malawi, chose the Cewa (Nyanja) as the representative ethnic group (Kishindo 1994; Mchombo 1998a, 2006a), creating many social and linguistic inequalities for speakers of other local languages (Kayambazinthu 1998). Many local languages have been displaced by the ciNyanja and ciTumbuka lingua francas, but ciTonga has vigorous usage in Nk’ata Bay and in smaller numbers in Mzimba, Rumpi, and Likoma. Many residents in border villages are bilingual in ciNyanja or ciTumbuka. According to the 2010 demographic census, ciTonga is the native language of around 213,779 people in Nk’ata Bay, covering 4089 km² (National Statistical Office and ICF Macro 2011). It belongs to the Benue-Congo branch of
the Niger-Congo language family (Lewis, Simons and Fenning 2015).

Some consider ciTonga the same group as ciNyanja and ciTumbuka (Guthrie 1948; Lewis, Simons and Fenning 2015); others classify ciTonga and ciTumbuka as part of one group, and exclude ciNyanja (Bryan 1959; Douglas 1950).

### 3.3.1 Phonetics

CiTonga has 32 single consonant phonemes including plosives, affricates, nasals, fricatives, glides, and laterals. It has eight prenasalized consonant phonemes that contrast with their non-prenasalized counterparts. Table 3.1, adapted from Mkochi (2014), presents the phonemic consonants in ciTonga. The vowels are not identical to the cardinal vowels described by the International Phonetic Alphabet. /i, e, o, u/ and are less tense than those of the Alphabet, while /a/ is more of a central vowel (Kishindo 1998).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bilabial</th>
<th>Labio-dental</th>
<th>Alveolar</th>
<th>Palatal</th>
<th>Velar</th>
<th>Labio-velar</th>
<th>Glottal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plosive</td>
<td>-n/-c</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>k̂</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+n/-c</td>
<td>mb</td>
<td>mp̕</td>
<td>nd</td>
<td>nj̕</td>
<td>nj̕</td>
<td>nj̕</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affricate</td>
<td>-n/-c</td>
<td>+n/-c</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasal</td>
<td></td>
<td>m</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>η</td>
<td>n̷</td>
<td>η</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fricative</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>z</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>χ̂</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glide</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>ŵ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lateral</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CiTonga has five phonemic vowels, /i, e, a, o, u/ which can be divided into those that are [+mid] and [-mid]: /e/ and /o/ are [+mid] and /i, e, a, u/ are [-mid]. This distinction plays a role in the vowel harmony of the verb stem in many Bantu languages (Katamba 1984; Mchombo 1998b, 2004; Mtenje 1985). Non-mid vowel consonants co-occur, for example the verb -cimbiya (run) contains only [-mid] vowels, /i/ and /a/. Outside the domain of verb stems, such as when the future suffix -engi containing [+mid] vowel /e/ is inflected, verbs like -cimbiyengi (will run) do not harmonize.

3.3.2 Phonology

In general, ciTonga syllables have short and long vowels in complementary distribution (Mkochi 2014) and allows only open syllables in consonant-vowel (CV) formations. Some consonant clusters are permitted but subject to phonotactic constraints. For example, the first consonant of two or more consonant syllable must be a nasal (Mchombo 2004). A word cannot begin with two adjacent vowels but an exception occurs when a vowel serves as a pronominal prefix. For example, when the pronominal prefix u- for class 1 precedes the associative marker a, ua becomes ŝa.
The chief of the foreigner.

The VV structure becomes a CV structure; [i] becomes [y] in the presence of in front of another vowel (Mchombo 2004:13). There are two register tones in ciTonga, high and low. A rule on the verb root in ciTonga restricts it to being either completely low-toned or to bearing only one high tone per root (Mtenje 1994; Mtenje 2004). The high tones usually surface on the penultimate syllable and follow the “Bantu rule of penultimate vowel lengthening” (Mkochi 2014).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low-toned verbs</th>
<th>High-toned verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STEM</td>
<td>ENGLISH GLOSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le.lee.s-a</td>
<td>look at/ see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>da.nii.k-a</td>
<td>answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sa.mbii.z-a</td>
<td>teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mbwii.k-a</td>
<td>jump</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM</td>
<td>ENGLISH GLOSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ci.mbii.j-a</td>
<td>run</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sa.mbii.l-a</td>
<td>learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to.ndee.k-a</td>
<td>fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khu.mbii.l-a</td>
<td>admire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3.3 Orthography

The orthography of Malawian languages developed sporadically during the late 19th century, chiefly to translate the Bible (Kishindo 1998), with one of the most prominent translations being the ciTonga Mazgu G\aku Ciuta (United Bible Societies 1986). As a result, there are several semi-official and non-official orthographic conventions (Kishindo 1998:85). I follow the orthographic
conventions of Mkochi (2014) for ciTonga and consult Kishindo’s (1998) convention for ciTumuka and ciYao: Aspiration is used contrastively in plosives and affricates and is represented by the superscript h, as with words like [kuto] (to marry) and [kutho] (to take). The c in ciTonga is pronounced /č/, contrasting with the aspirated phoneme /čʰ/, represented as čʰ. The mainstream orthography uses the symbols l and r to represent the phoneme /l/, but since [l] and [r] are allophones, I only use the l symbol. Traditionally, the different phonemes of [β] and [w] are both represented by w. This is problematic because, for example, awa represents both /awa/ (no) and /aβa/ (that [person]) in lay orthography and the two are distinguishable only through context. To avoid this confusion, I use the symbol Ŵ for [β] and w for [w]. The letters ng represent nasalized velar /ŋ/, as in words like ngombe (cow) and njinga (bike).

3.3.4 Morphology

CiTonga has nouns, verbs, pronouns, adjectives, numerals, demonstratives, quantifiers, interrogatives, prepositions, and ideophones (Nurse 2006). The word formation process in ciTonga conforms to the general Bantu pattern. Its words are formed through an agglutinative process, in which the correspondence between morpheme form and meaning exhibit a one-to-one correspondence.
The ciTonga verb root is the nucleus of the word, while the system of noun classes and concordances serve as relational elements affixed to the root (Guthrie 1962; Mchombo 2006b). The structure of a morphological word is represented in the following verb, “I caused him to cook” (Mkochi 2014: 27).

The final vowel (FV) fulfills the CV syllable structure of ciTonga. For example, the citation form ku-li-a (to eat) includes the infinitive (class 15) ku-, the verb stem -li-, and the final vowel -a. Because the underlying form kulia will produce a VV syllable, the surface form is kulya. The imperative form, such as cok-a (leave!) includes the final vowel but drops the infinitive prefix. CiTonga has both total and partial reduplications and have intensification purposes. The adjective kamana (small) is reduplicated for intensification:

(5) Kamana kamana ndi mteko.
17.small 17.small CONJ 6.branches
‘Little by little makes a bundle.’
Partial reduplication is often observed in the structure of the word itself, for example, *kubwata* (to boil) may be partially reduplicated to form the progressive aspect *kubwatabwata* (to boil continuously); the reduplication in this case also produces an ideophone used to depict the sound of water bubbling.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class No.</th>
<th>Prefix</th>
<th>SM</th>
<th>OM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>SG</td>
<td>m(u)-</td>
<td>-m(u)-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>PL</td>
<td>a-</td>
<td>-u-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>SG</td>
<td>m(u)-</td>
<td>-u-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>PL</td>
<td>mi-</td>
<td>-i-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>SG</td>
<td>li-</td>
<td>-i-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>PL</td>
<td>ma-</td>
<td>ηga-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>SG</td>
<td>ci-</td>
<td>ci-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>PL</td>
<td>vi-</td>
<td>vi-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>SG</td>
<td>∅</td>
<td>i-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>PL</td>
<td>∅</td>
<td>zi-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>SG</td>
<td>ka-</td>
<td>ka-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>PL</td>
<td>ti-</td>
<td>tu-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>SG</td>
<td>u-</td>
<td>u-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>INF</td>
<td>ku</td>
<td>ku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>LOC</td>
<td>pa-</td>
<td>pa-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>LOC</td>
<td>ku-</td>
<td>ku-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>LOC</td>
<td>m(u)-</td>
<td>m(u)-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Like all Bantu languages, ciTonga nouns are organized into noun classes through many historical semantic categories (Demuth 2000). All nouns beginning with prenasalized consonants are included in classes 9/10 in ciTonga (Table 3.3,
adapted from Mkochi (2014:20)). Noun class 1 and its plural form, 2, are the so-called “personal classes” of Proto-Bantu, but may also include non-personal nouns, especially in anthropomorphism (Watkins 1937:25). The plural form, class 2, may also be used to demonstrate respect. For example, references to people belonging to the generation above the speaker are always formed in the plural form. The a- prefix also attaches to the front of a person’s name to give respect, such as aCirwa (Mr. Cirwa) and aWelani (Ms. Welani) or anthropomorphic names such as aNkalamu (Mr. Lion). The Tonga people are called aTonga; foreigners are called azungu. Noun class 7 ci-, includes no n-person objects, and captures three types of nouns described in this dissertation. First, ci- means ‘language of,’ as in ciTonga ‘language of Tonga’ and cizungu ‘language of foreigners.’ Second, ci- is used for augmentation. For example, cinjinga ‘large bicycle.’ Third ci- includes nouns that begin with the ci- sound, such as cintu ‘thing,’ cikondi ‘love,’ and cisoti ‘hat.’ Noun class 8, vi-, is the plural form of noun class 7.

In general, ciTonga nouns are composed of a stem and a prefix. This nominal system includes an agreement patterning, in which the modifiers agree with the noun in the relevant features of gender and number (Mchombo 2006b). Some nouns are represented without prefixes in the singular form, such as those
in class 5. Their cognates in other Bantu languages have prefixes, suggesting that the ciTonga prefix might have been deleted following language change.

The local taxonomy for manual gestures are as follows (Wilkins, Kita, and Enfield 2007): In ciTonga, janja (pl. manja) means both palm and hand, mkono (pl. mikono) means wrist, and nkəonya (pl. nkəonya) means fist. A finger is called cikumbu (pl. vikumbu). The five fingers are called by their ordinal position relative to the thumb, cikufi (pl. vikufi), or by their representative function in daily life. For example, the middle finger can either be called cikumbu cacitatu (the third finger) or mvwala mpəeti (the one that wears a ring), because many people wear their wedding rings on the third finger if they wear one at all. The index finger

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CiTonga</th>
<th>English Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>janja</td>
<td>palm or hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nkəonya</td>
<td>fist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mkono</td>
<td>wrist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cikumbu</td>
<td>finger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nkomba pəala/ cikumbu cakukovye</td>
<td>index finger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mvwala mpəeti/ cikumbu cacitatu</td>
<td>middle finger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cikumbu cacinayi</td>
<td>fourth finger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cikumbu cimana</td>
<td>little finger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cikufi</td>
<td>thumb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cikumbu cakumalundi</td>
<td>toe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
has two names in ciTonga: cikumbu cakukovye (the finger for grabbing [nsima]) and mkomba pʰala (the grabber of porridge). The aTonga view the index finger as the primary tool for transferring food to the mouth.

### 3.3.5 Syntax

The basic word order in ciTonga fits the subject-verb-object typology found in other Bantu languages (Watters 1989), but as with other Bantu languages (Harjula 2004; Nurse 2006), the order can be rearranged when appropriate subject and object markers are affixed to the verb root (Mchombo 2004:20). Example (6) shows the basic word order in of a ciTonga sentence: the subject “the guest” precedes the verb “are going”, both followed by the goal “the village.”

(6) A-lendu ŋa-ku- y-a ku-muzi
2-guest 2SM-PRS-go-FV 15-3.village
‘The guest is going to the village.’ (formal)
‘The guests are going to the village.’ (plural)

As shown in the example, the ciTonga word is centered on the verb -y- ‘go.’ The subject marker, ŋa-, belongs to class 2 but is used here as the polite third person singular. The object noun -muzi has to occur next to and after the verb (Mchombo 2004). However, the subject noun can be moved to appear after
the verb, as shown in example (7) below.

(7) ̧wa-ku- y-a ku-muzi a-lenu 
2SM-PRS-go-FV 15-3.village 2-guest 
‘The guests are going to the village.’

This subject movement cannot disrupt the verb-object sequence, since doing so would make the sentence ungrammatical (Mchombo 2004). Overt nominal arguments can be dropped when subject and object markers are present (Mchombo 2004). Besides, these markers should be analyzed as pronominal arguments incorporated into the verbal morphology (Mchombo 2004). The wh-word in ciTonga remains in situ. Besides subject and object markers, the verb stem has proclitics that encode syntactic information such as tense and aspect, modals, conditional markers, directional markers, and so forth. CiTonga obeys domain boundaries when referencing antecedents. Consider this reflexive:

(8) Cikondi ̧wa-ga^hanag^hana kuti Madaliso ̧wa-ji- lengesya. 
Cikondi 2-think that Madaliso 2-REFLX-embarrass 
‘Cikondi feels that Madaliso embarrassed herself.’

In the embedded clause [that Madaliso embarrassed herself], ciTonga marks the subject of the verb with the third person prefix ̧wa, and the object, a reflexive, with the morpheme -ji-. As the object of the transitive verb, it is attached behind the object marker. Since ciTonga does not allow the marking of
multiple objects, no other object marker is allowed to occupy the object position that -ji- sits in (Mchombo 2004: 108-109). The reflexive anaphora -ji-
refers to Madaliso and not Cikondi because Madaliso c-commands -ji- in the embedded clause. In other words, when the anaphora -ji- looks for an antecedent within the local domain, Madaliso is the only qualified choice. Compare the reflexive in the next sentence:

(9) \textit{Cikondi₁ \textit{wa-gənaagə}ana kuti Madaliso₂ \textit{wa-mu}-lengesya.}
Cikondi 2-think-REFLX CONJ Madaliso 2-2-embarrass

‘Cikondi₁ feels that Madaliso₂ embarrassed her₁.’

In this situation, the direct object of the transitive verb \textit{lengesya} is represented by the object marker -\textit{mu}-. As a pronominal, -\textit{mu}- refers to Cikondi but not Madaliso because binding condition B requires -\textit{mu}- to search for its antecedent outside the local domain, where Cikondi is the viable choice. This anaphora example shows that the syntax of ciTonga obeys domain specific constraints.

3.4 Summary

I have attempted to give a brief summary of Tonga history, society, and the oral-auditory and the visual-gestural aspects of the language. In the first section, I showed that the Tonga society we know today stemmed from four clans.
Ordinarily families practice patrilineal kinship introduced by the invading Ngoni in the 18th century. Multimodal interactions play a large role in the transferring of Tonga history and morals; a skilled performer is adept at using vocal and nonvocal means to give vivid representations in the narrative. In the second section, I showed that cooperation, interdependence, and equality are central values for Tonga society. Social harmony is maintained by observing one’s rightful place in society, defined by gender and generation. The Tonga social norm, in other words, requires a person to behave according to his or her place in society and share an interdependent relationship with everyone else. Showing deference requires a specific body comportment that cannot be attributed to a single body movement. For instance, in malipenga performances, audiences show admiration for the dancers because they pay detailed attention to their clothing, give controlled yet extremely subtle body movements, and act in synchrony with the rest of the troupe. Women must sit modestly covering their extended legs, but they relax and sit like men when in familiar company. The social norm expects people to restrict their bodies so that they eliminate excessive and distracting body movement. Formal performances in Nk³ata Bay provide opportunities for people to gather, represent and enact local behavioral norms (Rubinelli and Cantoni 2006), and promote village morale.

In the third section, I presented the structure of ciTonga, showing that the
language shares many features with its linguistic neighbors, ciNyanja and ciTumbuka, and exhibit many structural properties that are common in Bantu languages. The language of the Tonga people, ciTonga, has five phonemic vowels and 32 phonemic consonants. CiTonga is a tonal language with high and low tones. The high tone typically falls on the penultimate position of the word. CiTonga only allows consonant clusters if the first consonant is a nasal in a cluster of more than two. CiTonga is an agglutinative language, and makes use of both partial and total reduplications. In its morphology, ciTonga fits the typical Bantu pattern. It has an extensive classification system for all nouns and an elaborate agreement system centered on the verb stem. In syntax, ciTonga exhibits a subject-verb-object basic word order.
4 Handedness in Everyday Rituals

In this chapter, I examine the significance of handedness in three types of everyday rituals: greeting and leave-taking, giving and receiving, and eating. Greeting and leave-taking are really two separate types of rituals; they take place at different points of an encounter and have vastly different structures in Nk³ta Bay. Giving and receiving, on the other hand, are reciprocal actions exchanged in a single event. These quotidian activities represent Tonga politeness norms with recognized and reproducible forms and structures.

4.1 Greeting and Leaving-taking

Greeting and leave-taking make up the boundaries of any encounter between two people (Goffman 1967). A greeting takes place near the opening of an encounter in which people will gain more “access” to each other as the exchange carries on (Goffman 1967, 1971). Leave-taking, on the other hand, takes place at the closing of an encounter in which people withdraw from the access (Goffman 1967, 1971). In both types, people act in accordance with the standard cultural script of their society (Ameka 2006).

Greetings take place near the beginning of an interaction when two people
come into contact to carry out a focused joint activity (Duranti 1997).

They have a bonding function (Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1977) that alleviates aggression (Kendon and Ferber 1973) and demonstrates trust (Firth 1972). Greetings can be identified by having some or all of the following structural criteria (Duranti 1997:67): the event occurs near the beginning of an interaction, the exchanges take place in a shared perceptual field, the exchanges form adjacency pairs, they have relative predictability in form and content, there is an implicit establishment of a spatio-temporal unit of interaction, and interlocutors identify each other as a being worth recognizing. Leave-takings follow similar structural criteria, but the event occurs near the end of an interaction. In Nk³ata Bay, the overall length of a leave-taking is longer than greeting because people want to show a reluctance for social separation. Many other cultural values are played out in the performance of greeting and leave-taking, including social footing, hospitality, interdependence, harmony, and inclusiveness (Ameka 2009).

Greeting is obligatory among many Bantu speakers (Wood 1992). ATonga frown upon people who see each other but do not kutauza (to greet). In West African ethnographic accounts, greetings are typically initiated by the participant with inferior status (Goody 2004; Irvine 1974; Schottman 1995; Youssouf, Grimshaw, and Bird 1976), for instance a Wolof person of a higher status is permitted to neglect greeting younger people (Irvine 1974). The same pattern
holds true among aTonga: greeting a younger person may be optional if the elder is occupied with other tasks. Younger people are obliged to initiate greeting, but they are also expected to wait for the availability of an elder if the latter is occupied with other people, they cannot abandon the greeting once they share a perceptual field with the elder. Table 4.1 presents typical verbal greeting “scripts” (Ameka 2009) in ciTonga. Between people of close solidarity distance, when a person of superior power status address on with inferior status, the second person singular pronominal prefix $w$- can be used instead.

Table 4.1  Typical ciTonga greeting exchanges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Default</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: $Mw-e$  $uli?$</td>
<td>2PL-PRS Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘How are you?’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: $Nd-e$  $umamp\textsuperscript{h}a, kwali imwi?$</td>
<td>1SG-PRS well, CONJ 2PL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I am well, and you?’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: $Nd-e$  $umamp\textsuperscript{h}a.$</td>
<td>1SG-PRS well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I am well.’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Meeting for the first time of the day, in the morning

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: $M-a$  $yuk-a$  $uli?$</td>
<td>2PL-PRSPFT-wake-FV Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘How have you woken?’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: $Nd-a$  $-yuk-a$  $umamp\textsuperscript{h}a, m-a$  $-yuk-a$  $uli?$</td>
<td>1SG-PRSPFT-wake-FV well, 2PL-PRSPFT-wake-FV Q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I have woken well, how have you woken?’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the verbal component of a greeting exchange, aTonga pose inquiries about the health and wellbeing of the interlocutors’ family and their possible visitors. “Wellbeing” questions show inclusiveness, a valued idea in many African societies (Ameka 2009). This type of inquiry may be a natural inclination for people to show concern for others (Dzameshie 2002; Egblewogbe 1990). Some studies demonstrate that such questions are preferentially answered by giving a positive response regardless of actual wellbeing, which may often amount to violating the Gricean maxim of quality (Leech 1983; Sacks 1975; Wierzbicka 1991). However, others note that greeting inquiries may be more genuine and sincere in non-Anglo-European societies (Ameka 2009). For instance, in a comparative survey between white and black South Africans, a great majority of
the black Africans considered wellbeing questions and their answers to be genuine and responded seriously (Van Jarrsveld 1988).

When people notice each other and intend to greet, the actual event can only begin when people come into an arm’s length distance from each other.

During my first visit to Cifila, many people corrected me for greeting “too early”, before we were close enough to see each other’s expressions. Factors that determine the timing of a ciTonga greeting are not easily distinguishable and include keen attention to multiple contextualization cues: for example, whether or not the other person has noticed you or if both parties are “ready” to greet because aTonga do not exchange a full greeting ritual if the other party is carrying out a difficult physical task or is out of breath. Among intimates, and in particular women, one person may shout at the other to fulfill the greeting obligation. My neighbors in Cifila often shouted mornings greeting at me from outside my nyumba when they decided that I should be awake already. This was also particularly common in Kavuzi since people are separated by hilly terrain that made it difficult for the exchange of proper wellbeing inquiries and the open space was easy for sound to travel. Other societies share this obligation to greet: among Wolof speakers, for example, people must greet each other even if doing so would require one party to make a wide detour (Irvine 1974).

In Malawi, the structure and content of greeting and leave-taking change
depending on the length of the encounter and its purpose. Short and unanticipated encounters, such as when people pass each other on the street, may only include the exchange of handshakes and one of the wellbeing adjacency pairs such as those presented in Table 4.1. These encounters are also known as “chance” encounters (Ameka 2006). Longer encounters are typically pre-arranged and will often include other activities such as the offering of water or food, thus forming a larger type of access ritual. These are also called planned encounters. When an important visitor arrives unannounced, he or she disturbs the daily operations of a compound and everyone there will have to accommodate the visitor. When a visitor arrives at the muzi, the most responsible and trusted child will grab a chair and position it a specified distance from the location of the host being visited. Additionally, other objects will be offered to make the visitor feel at home, such as clean water for drinking presented in a tumbler on a saucer, or a bowl of washed fruit.

Like greeting, people also carry out leaving-taking activities in a sequenced order. The leave-taking phase is enacted through various social rituals such as thanking and the performance of the final departure (Ameka 1999, 2009; Schegloff and Sacks 1973). In the pre-closing phase, the visitor signals his or her intention to bring the encounter to a close but often is refused by the host, who may ask the visitor to extend the visit by spending the night or to stay for nsima.
After some negation that ends with a visitor’s insistence on departure, the host often offers a *cibwaila*, a wrapped parting gift containing washed harvested crops such as bananas, peanuts, potatoes, or rice. The *cibwaila* is often prepared by another member of the household while a visit is still ongoing, because departures are often eminent. After the giving of *cibwaila*, a member of the host’s family will be sent *kulinda* (to escort) the guest and help him or her to carry the *cibwaila*. *Kulinda* is socially significant because it displays the host’s popularity and hospitality to other people in neighboring hamlets. When parting, people do not exchange any overt gestures. They may exit the access by lowering their bodies slightly and walking backwards for a few paces, with the option of producing a small handclasp. The following examples describe some frequently observed gestures in ciTonga greeting and leave-taking.

4.1.1 Handedness in Greeting

Greeting by hand has strong social significance in Nk^ata Bay. In fact, Tonga society requires people to exchange manual greeting gestures, even if doing so may be considered inconvenient to those unfamiliar to Tonga customs.

*Casa Handshake: Right Supported by Left*

Handshake is a gesture common across societies for exchanging good
feelings between two parties. In the West, handshake has been attested
to in Ancient Greet and Roman cultures—the Decrees for Samos shows Athena
and Hera exchanging a handshake as a sign of Athens and Samos’ alliance as
early as the fifth century B.C. (Acropolis Museum n.d.)—and it may have started
as a way to show that neither person held a weapon (Morris 1969). Handshake
requires mutual participation (Goffman 1971; Schiffrin 1981) and cannot be
completed if one person ignores the other’s outstretched hand—there is an
obligation to respond to what is being offered (Mauss 1990). The most common
and canonical greeting gesture in Malawí is called a *casa* (polite handshake)
(Mazibuko et al. 2007:18). It involves two people extending and holding each
other’s right hands while holding their own right forearms with the left hands.

Illustration 4.1  *Casa* (handshake)

Illustration 4.1 from my fieldwork shows two men exchanging a greeting
during a memorial service at Mphande. The elder man on the left had higher
social status than the younger man on the right, through his seniority.

Both extended their right hand for greeting but the younger man made more
effort to extend his arm far from his own body. He also placed his left hand on
the extended right forearm to form a respectful configuration (Kita and Essegbey
2001). The elder also extended his right hand for the handshake but positioned is
closer to his own body. The elder did not produce the respectful gesture but,
instead, placed his left hand on the right shoulder of the younger man forming a
light embrace. If people wish to show even more social distance, they may bend
their knees to “curtsey”, similar to how the younger man slouched a little to
minimized his height. The ways in which the two men position themselves and
their hands in Illustration 4.1 show that they are share a familiar relationship,
despite a power distance created by their age difference. The casa gesture has also
been observed in South Africa (personal communication with Heather Brookes
on July 9, 2014), Bantu speakers in Tanzania and Kenya, and Nilo-Saharan
language speakers in Western Kenya (Creider 1977).

When a small child performs casa, adults will accept any variant forms.

Casa is one of the earliest everyday rituals taught to children in Malawí. Once
children can walk and talk, caretakers will encourage them kutauza alendu (to
greet the visitor) when a visitor arrives. The child will walk up to the visitor and
hold out the right hand, often looking down at the ground because of shyness,
while uttering in a quiet voice the wellbeing inquiry. In this example from Camawoya, the two-year-old barely extended his right hand and did not quite form a respectful configuration with his left hand, even though it was extended. The boy produced a sign that was poorly formed and still in development, but the effort of his performance sufficed to fulfill the Tonga social imperative for showing inclusiveness toward visitors. This form politeness emerges from social actions and practices grounded in everyday socializations (Eelen 2001). This variation differs from child to child so there is no fixed form for children’s greeting gestures. This child-centered socialization (Garrett and Baquedano-López 2002; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986) shows that children are instructed to carry out greeting the same way as competent adults in Nk'ata Bay.

Illustration 4.2 *Kutauza alendu* (to greet the visitor)
Close friends may also exchange a handshake with their right hands but leave their left hands in a resting position next to the body (Illustration 4.3). *Kuko manja* is only performed in informal situations where two people wish to display their familiarity and affection for each other. This example taken from Camawoya shows two women holding hands (*kuko manja*) while greeting each other. Even though they differ in age, the two women shared a familiar relationship for having both lived in the same village for most of their lives. When *kuko manja*, people do not form any particular handshape as long as the right hands are touching. The right hands remain held for no less than five seconds and sometimes throughout the conversation. This prolonged hand contact allows people to display friendship and intimacy publically. While their hands touch, two people can covertly detect and evaluate each other’s health,
work ethic, and openness. A warm and soft hand may suggest a comfortable life indoors and a hand that pulls away too quickly may suggest a reluctance to be inclusive. In Western Keya, if people produce the handshake with too short of a duration and not enough “squeezing pressure,” they may only express an “ordinary” amount of politeness that is common when being introduced to people who are unfamiliar to them (Creider 1977). The importance of handshake is captured in this idiom (Mphande 2006):

(10) Ku-pas-ana timoneni mu-ko manja.
    15-give-REF greeting 2PL-hold 6.hands
    ‘To greet each other, you must hold the hands.’

People *ku ko manja* even when they are not exchanging a greeting to suggest a close and non-sexual friendship between two people: while they are talking and walking together. Handholding does not have a handedness because it typically takes place between two intimates who are walking and facing the same direction. People standing on the left side will use their right hand to hold the left hand of people standing on the right. This type of handholding is also common among friends of the same sex among societies in Western Kenya (Creider 1977). Handholding between members of the opposite sex, thereby displaying affection openly, is a taboo in Malawi and in many African societies (Cole and Thomas 2009).
When one person’s hand is dirty, the exchange of *casa* is obstructed and people will produce an alternative *kuko mikono* gesture to fulfill the greeting obligation. In this situation, the person with the dirty hand will offer the right wrist instead of hand and make it available for the other person to shake (Illustration 4.4). This type of greeting is only used between people sharing a close social distance because its one-handed configuration involves a dirty hand. In Nkata Bay, even a dirty hand is not an excuse to bypass the greeting ritual; people value the inclusiveness that emerges from a greeting more than the distance maintained by not shaking a dirty hand. People of Chad and South Africa make similar adjustments for the soiled right hand and also use the wrist handshake (Foster 2002:245). *Kuko mikono* shows that ciTonga speakers still prefer the right hand for greeting even when the left hand is visibly disabled.

*Kugiligisa: Tickle Handshake*

A Tonga informant described to me a form of handshake used for sexual
advances. This action takes place during a handshake, when one of the participants tickles, or *kugiligisa*, the right palm of the other using his right middle finger. The tickle of the palm is quick and fleeting, but the tickled sensation is enough to surprise the tickled. In Arabic-speaking societies, for example, the same gesture is used to both proposition and insult a chaste woman (Barakat 1973). This gesture is also ubiquitous in many societies today. The tickle handshake shows a semiotic property of gestures in face-to-face interaction: a sign may be either *on-record* or *off-record* (Brown and Levinson 1987). The production of the sign of a tickle handshake involves the participation of two people, a person carrying out the tickling (A) and a person being tickled during the handshake (B). When the middle finger of A flicks quickly and tickles the inner palm of B, two crucial features of the sign are produced: First, the tickling action is hard for anyone else to detect besides the two people shaking hands. Second, the action is off-record because it is invisible and the tickling happens behind the palm of B. Both of these features are essential for the movement to function as a potential sexual advance. The first is crucial because A wants the proposition to be private. The second feature, the fact that it is off-record, is also crucial because even if B rejects the proposition, neither A nor B will lose face. A cannot say that the proposition is on-record since no one but B noticed it. A nonverbal and off-record sign like the tickle handshake can be acknowledge or
ignored, as in the case of a misunderstanding or if B does not wish to engage in sexual relations with A.

*Kuk\textsuperscript{3}uza Malilo: Condolence Handshake*

*Kuk\textsuperscript{3}uza malilo* is a condolence handshake used to convey sympathy to relatives and friends of a recently deceased person (Mazibuko et al. 2007:19).

![Illustration 4.5  Kuk\textsuperscript{3}uza malilo (to condole the deceased)]

To produce this handshake, people rotate their right hands once in contact, using the web of the thumb as a pivot, and hold onto each other’s right thumbs using the remaining fingers. Often people enclose the shaking right hands with their left hands. This rotational handshake is typically used for consoling the sick or family members of the deceased at a funeral. The gesture has a similar function in Western Kenya, where the handshake is “alternated with putting hand[s] around [the] upright thumb of other person” (Creider 1977:3). Like the tickle handshake, people who exchange a *kuk\textsuperscript{3}uza malilo* also use it to express
both on-record and off-record intentions. On the surface, the movement and production of *kuk'uza malilo* signify that someone (A) is expressing condolence for the misfortune of another person (B). A can also express an additional off-record kindness by transferring money secretly to the recipient through the handshake. As in the tickle gesture, transferring money through *kuk'uza malilo* allows recipients to decide whether or not they want to acknowledge the gift publically. He or she can acknowledge the gift publically (on-record) by repeating and enlarging the rotating movement. Alternatively, the recipient can accept the gift in secret by maintaining the gesture as is. This option is useful when people do not want others to know that they have additional wealth, because they might be obliged to share it with others.

*Pepa: Cupped-hands*

*Pepa* is used when a person cannot physically reach everyone’s hands in a large group, or when the two parties meet for the first time. For example, when giving a public speech during a village meeting, the greeter is expected to give a verbal greeting and handclasp to every member present to show humility. In this situation, the hands are re-clasped as one moves on from one person to greet the next in the form of a light clap. People produce the *pepa* gesture by clapping and cupping the palms together so that the two hands form perpendicular
orientations to each other. The two hands are loosely stacked and it does not matter which is on top. For example, I saw a man placed his left hand on top in the Mphande memorial service (Illustration 4.6). As a right-hander myself, I am also included to position my left hand on top when producing this gesture.

![Illustration 4.6 Pepa (to appease)](image)

The *pepa* gesture has other functions outside of the greeting ritual. It can be a conventionalized quotable gesture that means, “Excuse me” or “Thank you.” During a burial, the family and friends attending the ceremony will also produce this gesture to appease and honor the dead, giving them final respect before they move on to the next world. In this situation, the gesturer will typically utter the words, “*pepa pepa*” [pleased be appeased], to wish the dead a good rest (Mphande 2006:140–141).
Kufungatila: Hugging

When two women are excited to see each other, they may exchange a hug (kufungatila). Eh-eh or aah interjection often precede the gesture to acknowledge each other’s presence and show excitement. Tonga men and women do not use hugs to greet each other because demonstrating emotional cross-gender intimacy in public is taboo in Tonga society. Kufungatila gesture, like the one-handed kuko manja and kuko mikono wrist handshake, is a sign of familiarity and inclusion. Compared with adult men, adult women perform more variations in their greeting gestures in Nk’ata Bay. Men also display closeness through gesture but they tend to perform gestures that remain faithful to the canonical casa configuration.

Illustration 4.7  Kufungatila (to hug)
4.1.2 Handedness in Leave-taking

Gestures do not generally play a prominent role in a ciTonga leave-taking ritual. They do not signify the end of an encounter; whether or not they are performed do not index social distance between two people. The gestures described in this section are all gestures that have both greeting and leave-taking functions. They are produced to acknowledge each other’s presence without any implications that the two should carry out verbal wellbeing exchanges or the elaborate closing rituals because their familiar relationship will not be altered by the absence of traditional gesture exchanges.

*Wat* Kısa: Hand Slap

A *wat* Kısa (hand slap or high-five) may be exchanged in place of a full handshake when an encounter is brief and people consolidate their mutual acknowledgement by a single gesture. In Nkata Bay, hand slaps are produced with the hands in vertical orientation and palms facing the interlocutor, all fingers extended and loosely apart. The illustration below shows two women greeting each other by extending their right hands for a quick hand slap in Camawoya, even though they are both carrying large loads on their heads. The gesturing hands were positioned on the right sides of their bodies at shoulder height (Illustration 4.8).
The activity of carrying objects on the head (*kudekeza*) is limited to women and children; men carry objects by hand or over the shoulder. Women and children unload their cargo (*katundu*) only if they sense that the greeting conversation will be long and that the interlocutor could help them re-load the *katundu* onto their heads. A headloading woman may be exempt from delivering *casa*, since the size of the *katundu* may prevent such close contact or the objects may spill. Under these circumstances, the headloader may curtsey instead. The Gonja in Ghana observe the same cultural practice when headloading: “A woman returning from the waterside with a heavy calabash on her head may make a verbal greeting only, if it is a young or unimportant man she passes. But should she meet her husband, or a chief, a woman will remove her burden and crouch beside it until he has gone on” (Goody 2004).
ATonga sometimes use the left hand to produce a ŵatʰabwa gesture. A person may initiate a greeting or leave-taking gesture with the left hand when there is physical obstruction. An example from my fieldwork shows a man and a woman bidding farewell to each other; the man happened to be riding in the back of a matola (pick-up truck). The recording did not capture any verbal exchanges, but they raised their arms to exchange a ŵatʰabwa.

Illustration 4.9  ŵatʰabwa ndi manja ŵa kumaze (left-handed high five)

The man extended his left hand to ŵatʰabwa and his female interlocutor returned the gesture. The use of the left hand in this case may be due to the familiar relationship between the two people since they acknowledge each other publically. Generally, Tonga culture forbids adult men and women from displaying this kind of public greeting. The timing of this interaction may also be a factor since it was very limited because the matola pulls away as the two people
exchanged the gesture. The driver in front was unaware of the two people bidding farewell. The third and most limiting factor was the spatial availability of the person sitting on the matola. The right side of the man was visibly disabled since it was facing the inside of the truck bed. If the man turned his body around in order to greet her with her with the right hand, he would have to make this exchange unnecessarily complicated, violating the Gricean maxim of manner (Grice 1975). In this example of a leave-taking, the physical availability of the gesturer outweighs the requirement for left hand suppression. The two people relegated this farewell exchange to their left hands so that a feeling of friendliness, or positive face, could be maintained. This particular example shows that a more pressing adjustment for the physical constraint allows the violation of the left hand taboo.

*Kupaska Timoneni Ndi Mikono: Wrist Bump*

A variation on the ṭatʰabwa is the wrist “bump”, exchanged during a brief encounter and one person’s hand is dirty. In the example from Camawoya, the woman the right had been putting dishes away on the citantali when she saw her aunt approaching (Illustration 4.10).
The aunt responded with the same gesture. This gesture is related to *kuko mikono* used during greeting. In *kuko mikono*, after the wrist grasp handshake is performed people will proceed to exchange verbal wellbeing inquiries. In the gesture presented here, the verbal inquiries do not follow version because the gesture is produced in passing. Both *wat’abwa* and *kupaska timoneni ndi mikono* index that participants share a close social relationship.

**Sharp: Thumbs-Up**

The *sharp* (thumbs-up) gesture is another action used to greet each other in passing, usually between same-sex similar-age peers. People produce *sharp* by pointing the thumb upward while the other fingers bend inward toward the palm. Either the right or left hand may be used to produce the thumbs-up gesture (Illustration 4.11).
Illustration 4.11  \textit{Sharp} (thumbs up)

Typically used among young people in Malawi, the \textit{sharp} gesture fits the observation that young people do not always exchange a handshake during an encounter (Schiffrin 1981; but apparently not Parisian youths, Nathalie Dajko notes to the author, March 6, 2015). The gesture is often accompanied by the verbal utterance \textit{sharp} among ciTonga speakers, but residents in the southern part of Nk\textsuperscript{a}ata Bay exchange the ciNyanja slang \textit{zabo} (what’s up). The meaning of this gesture is context-dependent because \textit{sharp} can also be produced outside of the leave-taking and greeting domains to show a young person’s approval for someone’s cleverness.

\textit{Kusunt\textsuperscript{a} Manja: Handwave}

A handwave is a gesture used for bidding farewell in Nk\textsuperscript{a}ata Bay. Children may yell \textit{bye-bye} or \textit{bye-bye azungu} (foreigner) at the passerby, indicating that that the gesture may be borrowed from English speakers.
I have only observed children waving this way to foreigners, perhaps because local adults prefer hosts to produce subtler rituals, such as *kulinda* (to escort). Adults rarely wave their hands to say good-bye, except when one of the parties is departing in a vehicle. In such a case, the two parties will typically wave until they can no longer see each other. Waving and shouting are generally considered impolite and only take place between close friends. A handwave is also used to express “goodbye” in Western Kenya (Creider 1977).

### 4.1.3 Discussion

In this section, I presented common ciTonga gestures used to mark the opening and closing of an encounter. Certain gestures are only used for greeting, such as *casa*, the *kuko manja*, *kuko mikono*, *kugiligisa*, *kukhiza malilo*, and *kufungatila*. The *pepa* gesture functions as a quotable gesture—expressing gratitude or appeasement toward the spirit of the deceased—in addition to its function as a greeting opening. Some gestures are used both in greeting and leave-taking, such
as ſatʰabwa hand slap, sharp, kupaska timoneni ndi mikono, and kusuntʰa manja. Table 4.2 summarizes polite and familiar gestures used for greeting and leave-taking rituals in Nkʰata Bay.

Table 4.2  Deferential and familial greeting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TWO-HANDED</th>
<th>ONE-HANDED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deferential</td>
<td>casa, pepa, kukʰuza malilo</td>
<td>_______________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familial</td>
<td>kufungatila</td>
<td>ſatʰabwa, sharp, kuko mikono,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>kugiligisa, kusuntʰa manja</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The polite greeting gesture *casa* has the canonical form of supporting the handshake right hand with the left hand (Figure 4.1 left). When produced by a young person learning how to greet, it may have the variant form in which the left hand does not fully support the right (Figure 4.1 middle). When produced between two close friends, the handshake turns into a handhold showing familiarity (Figure 4.1 right). The forms reflect whether people have deferential or familial relationships with each other.
Tonga men typically do not deviate from the *casa* gesture, but they may produce the more familiar one-handed gestures if necessary. For example, I observed a man exchanging a *wat'abwa* with his female friend. He chose to use his left hand probably because his entire right side was obstructed by the *matola*. The left-handed was also permitted because he exchanged a farewell with a familiar friend. People of the opposite sex only display this type of intimacy if they are very familiar with each other.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 4.2  Contextual factors for left-handed *wat'abwa***

Besides people’s social distances, their physical postures at the time of greeting also influence greeting forms. For example, in the wrist handshake used when people’s hands are dirty, there are two forms used depending on whether someone is sitting or standing. When the hand is dirty from eating *nsima*, an
activity that is carried out sitting down, the greeting will hold the wrist
of the person with the dirty hand (Figure 4.3 left) When people are standing up,
they may exchange a bump on their right forearms (Figure 4.3 right).

In Nkata Bay, manual actions express politeness during in the greeting
ritual. Manual gestures play a smaller role in the leave-taking ritual in formal
situations. Despite the prevalence of manual gestures in Tonga greeting and
leave-taking, it is not a universal expression. Among Yoruba speakers, a
handshake is not a traditional form of greeting; people typically bow or produce
various forms of body lowering toward elders (Orie 2012).

4.2 Giving and Receiving

Giving and receiving rituals also have consistent structures and forms that
reinforce Tonga sociocultural norms. According to the Tonga worldview,
interdependence, including the sharing of material goods, is essential for
maintaining interpersonal harmony. The act of giving is considered an investment for the future, because it suggests that the recipient may return the charitable act when the giver needs help. This is noted in a Tonga proverb (Mphande 2006):

(11) *Kupaska nakusiunga*
    ‘to give is to store’

Giving is a socially sanctioned requirement (Mauss 1990) in Nkata Bay and it is performed by a combination of body posture and conventionalized gestures with specified handedness. Not exhibiting graciousness through these gestures may reduce the chance of receiving again, so receivers have a valid incentive to produce the most polite gesture form.

Giving and receiving may be classified as both an everyday ritual and a formal ritual for their socially markedness and requirement for advance planning. I am aware of two formal rituals for giving and receiving in Nkata Bay: bridal and kitchen showers. During a bridal shower party, one or more girls getting married are given numerous presents as they sit in the middle of a circle with their bodies concealed by *vitenje* (wrapped fabrics). Their friends and relatives will approach them dancing and singing while giving the brides-to-be gifts of money or clothing and accessories that they will need for the wedding. A
kitchen shower, or *cipongo*, is typically sponsored by someone’s *apongo* (sister-friend), a designated “friend” committed to purchase large quantities of gifts. An *apongo* relationship includes two or more women who take turns hosting each other’s *cipongo*. During a *cipongo* celebration, the giving *apongo* arrives in the receiving *apongo*’s home with female escorts that help carry the gifts. The receiver prepares large quantities of food to show her sincerity and appreciation for her *apongo*. Throughout the day-long event, the receiver must “earn” her presents by exhibiting the food that she has set aside, such as tubs of cassava flour and numerous chickens, and entertaining the guests with music and dancing. Only until the giver is satisfied with the receiver’s efforts will the former reveal her gifts, such as various sizes of pots and pans, cups, and fabrics.

Giving and receiving as everyday rituals also require both parties to express appropriate appreciation. In what follows, I will introduce the canonical gesture of giving and receiving in CiTonga. I will then present three variations and their politeness implications.

### 4.2.1 Two-handed Asymmetry: Polite Giving and Receiving

In CiTonga, the canonical form for both giving and receiving requires both hands, whereby the right hand contains the transferring object while the left hand encircles the right forearm. This gesture configuration is similar to the
two-handed *casa* handshake. In the following example from Yavimba, both a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law carried out a giving and receiving exchange after I purchased some dried fish for the family for *dende* and gave it to the daughter-in-law (right).

![Illustration 4.13 Giving and receiving with both hands](image)

The daughter-in-law immediately shared the *dende* with her mother-in-law, extending her right hand containing the fish with her left hand holding onto the right forearm. Even though the daughter-in-law performed the charity, she showed respect to her mother-in-law by giving the *dende* with a polite gesture. The mother-in-law received the gift of *dende* with both hands in a symmetrical configuration to form a container for the fish. CiTonga idiom also explains that using two hands show the graciousness of the receiver (Mphande 2006:82).
The giver gave politely so that she could “save” the charitable act and perhaps be a recipient in the future. The receiver received with both hands extended symmetrically, showing graciousness toward her daughter-in-law. The use of polite handshapes also suggests that the two parties respect each other’s social position and reveals a deferential in-law relationship. This example shows the canonical form of polite giving, which involves the asymmetrical use of both hands, with the right hand coming in contact with the object and the left hand supporting the right. For receiving an object, there are two recognized handshapes: two-handed asymmetry, just as in the giving gesture, and two-handed symmetry, shown in the example above. My informants from Malawi noticed the same gesture in other parts of Bantu southern and eastern Africa, including Kenya, Tanzania, and South Africa.

Sometimes a two-handed gesture is used even when the giver has nothing to give. For example, during church services in Malawi, everyone participating in the service will walk up to a collection basket placed in front of the altar and give monetary donations to the church. Sometimes I observed that a person dipped his or her right hand, supported by the left, into the collection basket, moving the
hand as if it is dropping money, whether or not the giver actually has any money to donate on that particular Sunday. I notice similar gestures of giving in church services in the United States, when a person puts his or her hand in the basket without actually providing any monetary donation. This is significant because the gesture itself shows politeness and respect, regardless of what is given. It also hides a person’s shame in not giving anything and his or her fear of being identified as a shirker of duty. In Malawi, the act of giving money is always performed by the right hand supported by left, never the right or left hand alone. This handedness requirement shows a strong implementation of the taboo in the religious domain.

4.2.2 Right Hand Only: Casual Giving and Receiving

The preceding example showed the canonical handshapes for giving and receiving between two parties who showed graciousness toward each other. In contrast, there are variant gesture configurations used between two parties who wish to show familiarity. An example of a familiar exchange is one in which two parties wish to show consent toward a topic in a discourse. The giver symbolically “gives” consent by motioning the right palm in prone position toward the receiver’s hand; the receiver shows the agreement by extending his or her right palm in an open palm supine configuration.
In Illustration 4.14, the two women in Camawoya had been complaining about financial troubles in their respective homes. They discussed ways of generating income and the woman on the left commented that they were enjoying tea and snacks, even though they should be feeling guilty from not making any profits from their rice business:

1  
Vyo sonu musanawale ta-mwi-yanga-pu weni-wo tea
Like-this now today 1PL-drink-CAUS 16 PDEM tea
‘Today we are drinking this tea here…’

2  
ti-nda-guliske-pu olu one tambala
1PL-PERF-sell-LOC CONJ one tambala
‘we have not even sold one tambala [of rice].’

As she said “one tambala,” the woman on the left held out her right hand, and the woman on the right slapped it with her own right hand, forming a
The gesture was accompanied by a smile showing positive sociality (Spencer and Pahl 2006). I observed this gesture throughout Malawi but mainly between adult women. The example shows that the right hand is used for both giving and receiving even when the object being transferred is intangible, such as the exchange of mutual understanding.

Giving with right hand only can be observed during social events when money is given to the host. During a wedding or fundraising party, a master of ceremonies stands in the middle of an open space with a winnowing basket laid on the ground in front of him. With party music blasting in the background, the master of ceremonies calls different groups of people—according to their gender, age, or the color of shoes that they are wearing—up to the front to dance around the winnowing basket, just like in a bridal shower.

Illustration 4.15  Zowala (wedding)
As the guests dance around the circle, they throw money into the winnowing basket with only their right hand. This money giving action is called *kuponyo ndalama* (to throw money) and has been adapted into the ciTonga quotable gesture repertoire. The gesture for *kuponyo ndalama* shows the same handshape and movements as real money giving, suggesting that the gesture has embodied roots in the practical actions of everyday.

### 4.2.3 Giving with One but Receiving with Both

People omit two-handed giving and receiving configurations when they do not show deference to their addressee, either because they have a higher social status or because they do not view the given object as something significant. For example, the following example from Kavuzi shows a man giving a washbasin containing dirty hand-wash water to his sister-in-law. The man extended only his right hand to transfer the object and did not extend his left hand to fulfill the deferential handshape. The recipient did not receive charitable gift but a basin of dirty hand wash water, but despite these circumstances, she received the basin with her right hand while extending her left hand in midair, fulfilling the deferential form for receiving politely (Illustration 4.16).
The receiver demonstrated deference toward her brother-in-law, who chose her as the recipient of the basin because of her relation to him and proximity to *kubwalo* where she can dump the water. The giving handshape of the brother-in-law suggested disrespect for the recipient and the object being given. This incident reveals how the theory of community of practice contributes to understanding gendered behaviors and women’s social status (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992, 2003). Tonga women assume all activities related to the preparation and presentation of *nsima*, and share these domestic and culinary practices with girls and other women in the *paduli* (food preparation area). The *paduli* community of practice produces gender-specific symbolic systems and instills women’s role as food providers and servicers for *nsima* consumption. Bringing and taking away the washbasin are the activities of the *paduli*, not
mpala; of women, not men. The man’s one-handed washbasin giving
and the woman’s respectful two-handed reception show that handedness in
giving and receiving indexes gender identities that are created through distinct
communities of practice.

In another example, a different man in the Kavuzi trading center gave an
object with his left hand only, but his recipient received it with both hands
(Illustration 4.17). The male school administrator gave his female friend a piece
of paper containing credit for a cellphone because he frequently assisted other
villagers in making small purchases in the grocery store, and his generosity was
well known. The female friend graciously received the cellphone units with both
hands in an asymmetrical configuration, with the left hand supporting the right,
even though her left hand carried objects that obstructed its mobility.
While not shown in the illustration, he did not face the recipient of his gift. The fact that he gave the cellphone units away with his left hand alone suggested he cared very little about the act of giving. This gesture showed that a familiar relationship existed between the giver and the receiver. As a giver, he did not want to make a big deal out of his generosity and so in doing so he saved the face of his interlocutor. I observed another instance in which a man saw a woman approaching her home with the day’s newspaper in Mphande. He approached her and requested for her paper and the woman complied by offering it to him with both hands. He received it with just his right hand. Even though he was the recipient of someone’s good will, he did not show politeness for her action. It is possible that men are socially allowed to give one-handed because of their higher position in Tonga society, but more data would be needed to confirm this hypothesis. Giving and receiving with both hands, whether in symmetrical or asymmetrical configurations, represent politeness; giving with only one hand suggests informality and indifference toward the transferring object and the recipient.

Unlike the two examples above, one-handed giving may be considered polite if it is performed in conjunction with other deferential body movements.
For instance, I observed a young man returning to the Capongolela hamlet after harvesting crops in the field. His right hand carried a hoe that hung over his right shoulder and his left hand held several of *vigau* (cassava). Upon returning, the young man noticed a man visiting his father sitting in the *mpala* so he approached the visitor in order to share what he had just harvested. Because he carried the hoe dangling over his right torso, he extended the left hand that happened to carry *vigau*. He also lowered his torso by bending his knees and thereby minimized his height, fulfilling an act of respect (Illustration 4.18). In this situation, the young man had to break the left hand taboo because of his physical constraint. His right hand and arm were occupied by a more difficult task: they had been balancing the hoe on the right shoulder before he placed it on the ground to show politeness toward the visitor.
The footing of the interlocutors also played a role in shaping the
young man’s decision to give with his left hand. The visitor was a family friend
residing nearby and had come over for a casual visit. Due to the close friendship
with the elderly visitor and the fact that the young man’s left hand already
contained the cassava, the latter was able to violate the social obligation of giving
with the right hand. If he were to have dropped everything and given the man
the objects with his right hand, he might be suggesting that their relationship
was not as close as the visitor believed, thus threatening his “positive face”
(Brown and Levinson 1987). Moreover, the young man still demonstrated respect
toward his elder interlocutor in performing other respectful expressions. In this
situation the physical and social constraints are ranked higher than the cultural
constraint on the use of the left hand.

4.2.4 Discussion

The six examples of giving and receiving above show that different
handshapes used in giving and receiving have contrastive patterns that index
distinct social positions for people in the events of performance (Agha 2005). The
default deferential handshape is produced two-handed with the left hand
holding the right forearm (Figure 4.4 left).
People may give and receive one-handed if they share a familiar relationship and the transferring act is informal, such as an acknowledgement of someone’s joke (Figure 4.4 right). The choice of different handshapes indexes different social distances, just as in the deferential and familial forms of second person pronouns in many Indo-European languages.
The observance of the left-handed Tonga taboo is determined by the social positions of the giver and receiver, the object being transferred, and the limitation of space in which the action takes place. For instance, left hand restriction is lifted when the giver is in a higher social position than the receiver (Figure 4.5 left), or if the right hand is visibly disabled (Figure 4.5 left). If the giver still wishes to show respect, he may perform other deferential body movements such as bowing and kneeling to minimize his presence. The effects of physical constraint on visible utterances also applies to Yoruba, in which the left hand may be the dominant articulator only when the right hand is visibly disabled, such as after people use it for eating (Orie 2009).

Giving and receiving rituals feature a power relationship relative to context. Tonga men usually outrank women, regardless of whether they are on the giving or receiving end. The gender imbalance observed in giving and receiving is less common in greeting. During greeting, people tend to perform gestures that are similar to their interlocutor’s. Aside from gender factors, people give and receive using deferential handshapes because they want to show appreciation for another’s kindness so they can potentially receive benefits again. This fits the humanistic doctrine in African societies, where mutual assistance and dependency are essential for maintaining social harmony.
4.3 Eating: Right Hand, Right Side

What people eat and how they eat it reveal social processes relevant to the understanding of everyday rituals. Food and eating also shape the collective memory of a society (Holtzman 2006; Mintz and Du Bois 2002). Societies that eat with their hands have an overwhelming preference for eating with their right hand while eating with the left hand is highly stigmatized (De Agostini et al. 1997; Osseo-Asare 2005). Children are socialized to accept these practices as the rightful ways of doing things. A Tonga informant told me that he forced his left-handed daughter to write and eat with her right hand.

During mealtime in Nkâta Bay, women sit around the food clockwise, with their bottom close to the food and their feet pointing away from it. In this
clockwise fashion, the food is accessible to the right side of everyone’s body, allowing a woman to use her right hand to reach for *nsima* or *dende*. Since men wear trousers and almost always sit on an elevated chair or stool, they sit with their knees apart and reach forward and downward for the food. Children are divided into smaller groups if there are many of them or if the children belong to separate age groups. For example, shortly after the food had been distributed, a woman from my fieldwork in Capongolela told her niece Mphatso, shown in the lower right corner of the illustration, that she sat inappropriately and that she showed her underwear beneath her skirt (Illustration 4.19).

1  *Apa ndipu pa-ja ujeni pa-oneke apa.*  
16-ANF whatd’youmacallit 16-show  
‘Right here you are showing your [underwear].’

Upon hearing this remark, Mphatso immediately closed her legs and put them in an L-shaped configuration (Illustration 4.20). Her legs extended straight in front of her and she positioned them tightly together, with the bottom of the right foot positioned slightly on top of the left. At the age of three, Mphatso had not yet internalized the polite sitting posture of adult women, but she knew the requirement of keeping her legs tightly together when sitting. This modification, however, did not satisfy the aunt. She told Mphatso again that she sat poorly, but this time, she told her to face her feet in a different direction:

*Mp*atso 2EMP 2SG-stay-FV bad,  *Mpha* 2SG-face DEM

‘*Mp*atso you are sitting poorly, you should face here.’

While saying this, the aunt got up and lifted up *Mp*atso and re-oriented the girl so that the food was placed on her right side (Illustration 4.21). The incident shows that during *nsima*, people not only prefer to eat with their right hand but also that food should be placed on their right side, this lateral preference is instructed from at a young age. I had also been corrected numerous times for sitting incorrectly, thinking that eating with my right hand was sufficient, when in fact, sitting right-sided was also required for women.

Even though aTonga reserve the right hand and right side for eating, the left hand may be used as a prop to hold food that needs to be consumed with
both hands. For example, when eating small bony fish such as *ut’haka*,
people use the left hand to hold the fish and use the right hand to pick off the
meat. The idea of filth associated with the left hand in Arabic-speaking countries
may not apply to ciTonga. The left hand may be used for eating food that is not
*nsima*. For example, during breakfast, people may use their right hand to hold
the teacup while using the left hand to hold the food, such as a boiled *cigau*. I
observed a man used his left hand to pick up and eat a *mandazi*, a fried donut
common in Malaŵi, and his right hand to stir the tea. Even though food should
be consumed with the right hand, this hand can be assigned to another task that
requires more dexterity.

![Illustration 4.22  Snacking with the left hand](image)

What might explain this exception is that, unlike lunch and dinner with
ritualized structures and content, the content and consumption of snacks are
unpredictable. In many parts of the country, breakfast and teatimes are
sometimes skipped altogether in order to conserve firewood and water (Brouwer
et al. 1996). Both hands are used for eating different types of foods, but only the right hand is allowed for handling *nsima*. Food must also be placed on people’s right side.

### 4.4 Summary

In this chapter, I examined handedness in three ciTonga everyday rituals, ordinary routines with conventionalized forms and structures that reinforce sociocultural norms. The rituals include greeting, leave-taking, giving and receiving, and eating. Eating is always produced with the right hand, while other rituals have various configurations. When eating *nsima*, the right hand is the only hand allowed to come into contact with food. Not only is it used to transport food from a container to the mouth, it is also used to mold, squeeze, evaluate, and “taste” the food. Besides the right hand, the entire right side of the body must face the food. People must use their right hand even if they are left-handers. The left hand has a supporting function when eating a meal, because it functions as a prop when people eat food that requires both hands. The examples discussed in the chapter are summarized in Table 4.3, showing that the right hand is the preferred hand.
### Table 4.3 Handedness in everyday rituals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Right</th>
<th>Left</th>
<th>Symmetry</th>
<th>Asymmetry</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEAVE-TAKING</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIVING</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECEIVING</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most greeting, leave-taking, giving, and receiving events involve the participation of two people. Generally, the forms of the ritual activities index the social distance between people. People express deference by producing two-handed gestures, or express familiarity by using one-handed gestures. For instance, giving and receiving with only one-hand suggests that the gesturer does not regard the recipient and the transferred object with deference. This can take place between two friends exchanging jokes or between men and women, who do not have the same social status in Nk'ata Bay. Familiar and deferential relationships are also indexed by the combined performance of other multimodal utterances. For instance, a person may give objects with only the left hand, but if he or she performed other body movements such as bowing and kneeling, other people may still consider the actions to be respectful. The common thread that allows people to use their left hand for greeting, giving, and eating is that the social relation of an event determines handedness, not the rituals themselves.
5  Handedness in Quotable Gestures

In this chapter, I describe the use of handedness in ciTonga gestures that generally have conventionalized form and meaning, known as *quotable gestures*. To do so, I first summarize the current understanding of the functional and structural properties of quotable gestures, including a discussion on handedness in existing gesture repertoires. Next I interpret the uses and functions of 32 ciTonga quotable gestures in three handedness configurations: two-handed symmetry, two-handed asymmetry, and one-handed.

5.1  Background

The gestures presented in this chapter are also known as *autonomous gestures* (Payrató 1993), *symbolic gestures* (Efron 1972; Calbris 1990; Poggi and Zomparelli 1987), or *emblems* (Brookes 2004; Kendon 1990; 1992). Quotable gesture is the most suitable for describing these ciTonga gestures because their meaning can be “quoted” like words or phrases, with commonly acknowledged citation forms (Kendon 1990; 1992). Other terms, like emblems and symbolic gestures, only capture their semiotic properties and do not include the gestures’ significant illocutionary contribution to naturally occurring conversations.
Compared to the improvisational and idiosyncratic gesticulations (see section 1.2.4), quotable gestures appear more stable in their use and production. For example, a gesture produced by the extension of the index and middle fingers commonly signifies the number “two”, bearing an iconic resemblance to its referent (Figure 5.1 left).

The same gesture also means “peace” in the United States, but the association between the form and meaning is less salient. The form of this gesture is rigid, lifting another finger will produce a different gesture, for example lifting the little instead of middle finger produces the “horn” gesture in Italian, a common representation of a cuckold, the traditional term for a man with an unfaithful wife (Figure 5.1 right). In the U.S. State of Texas, however, people use the gesture to show solidarity with a local public university’s athletic team, because its mascot is a longhorn bull. These anecdotal examples show that the production of a quotable gesture relies on structural stability and gesturers from different
linguistic and cultural backgrounds may assign different meaning to
the same form (Axtell 1997; Kendon 1981).

Quotable gestures are often classified by their functions. There are lexical
gestures, which are equivalent to single words and conveys semantic content;
and holophrastic gestures, which complete illocutionary acts (Kendon 1992b)
such as making a discourse request (Kendon 1981; Payrató 1993). For instance,
the mano a borsa (hand purse) gesture in southern Italy can pose questions to
other people in the discourse, or indicate the gesturer’s attitude toward
something that has been said (Kendon 1992). Many quotable gestures serve both
lexical and holophrastic functions. For example, the “clever” gesture popular in
urban South Africa expresses a range of meanings on its context of production.
The gesture has the lexical meaning of “streetwise,” but it may also be used
holophrastically as a greeting action as in “I see you” (Brookes 2001).

**Symmetry Constraints**

There are five possible handedness configurations when producing a
conventionalized kinesic sign: right hand only, left hand only, two-handed
symmetry, and two-handed asymmetry. Two-handed gestures follow a principle
of symmetry constraint (Battison 1974) that applies to both sign language and
gesture (Kita, van Gijn, and van der Hulst 1998). The symmetry constraint holds
that if both hands move independently during a given two-handed sign or gesture, then the specifications for handshape and movement must be identical, and the locations of the hands must be on corresponding halves of the body as horizontal reflections of each other (Battison 1974). The following illustration from my fieldwork provides an example of the constraint, showing a woman in Capongolela producing the nt\textsuperscript{ksi} (power) with both hands producing identical handshapes and movements on either sides of her body (Figure 5.2).

![Figure 5.2 Symmetry constraint in nt\textsuperscript{ksi} (power)](image)

The constraint is lifted when a hand is involved in a non-gestural task, such as driving (Xiong, Quek, and McNeill 2002), and its form is also more flexible during transitional stages of a gesture phrase, for example when one hand transforms into a different gesture or when it prepares to join the other hand to produce a symmetrical gesture, as noted in my ciTonga data. Asymmetry occurs when hands produce non-identical handshapes and/or
movements. An example of this is the kugutša (to be packed or full of X) noted in my fieldwork in Kavuzi trading center, produced by a woman positioning right hand in open palm prone and using the left hand to form a fist with the thumb side facing up. The left hand maintains stationary front of the upper gesture space while the right hand slaps onto the left fist (Figure 5.3).

Asymmetry gestures follow a dominance constraint, which states that the dominant hand will always be the articulator, and the non-dominant hand is stationary and forms only a limited set of handshapes (Battison 1974).

Another type of asymmetry occurs when the handshapes are identical but with different orientations and non-symmetrical locations along the vertical axis. The handshapes and movements are vertical reflections of each other, one on top and the other on bottom, as shown in an example of kuyesa (to measure) gesture from my fieldwork in a dairy processing center by the Mphande household. The
man produced the gesture with the right palm prone and left palm supine. Vertical reflections do not fit the symmetry condition because the hands do not share the same forearm positions or places of articulation (Battison 1974).

Figure 5.4 Orientation asymmetry kuyesa (to measure)

In sign language, once a hand is designated to be the dominant hand, it must be used consistently in the signing process (Vicars 2004). The choice of left or right may result in a significant phonological difference in sign language (Battison 1974). This type of designation may not exist in ciTonga quotable gestures, as we shall see with more examples presented in this chapter.

**Handedness in Gesture Repertoires**

Many gesture repertoires contain certain forms that must to be performed by a specific hand. For instance, even though there is no longer a bias against
using the left hand in the U.S., several gestures must be produced by the right hand, such as the pledge allegiance to the flag gesture (Figure 5.5 left).

In military gesture, the right hand is designated for salutations (Figure 5.5 right).

In Catholic and Orthodox Christian societies around the world, the right hand is used to produce the sign of the cross by the faithful, whether they are left- or right-handers, because of strong right-left symbolisms in Christian theology.

Many existing gesture repertoires provide detailed description of handshape and movement but few note the significance of handedness. In his repertoire of Arabic quotable gestures, Barakat (1973) describes handedness in many quotable gestures such as the greeting gesture by “pressing [the] palm of [the] right hand on chest”. In another gesture signaling a threat, the “right forefinger is held firmly down by the right thumb with other fingers extended like a fan, and [the] hand is then moved several times.” It is unclear whether
right hand is required for both gesture forms or it happened to be used by someone when he observed the gestures. In the gesture for sexual advance whereby a gesturer “tickle[s] the palm of a woman when shake[ing] hands”, Barakat (1973) does not specify which hand is preferred. Two studies in Kenya also noted handedness in gesture repertoires. Creider (1977) observes that the right hand plays a dominant role in certain gestures, such as the “listing” and “no more” gestures, but he does not specify handedness in others, such as “annoyance” and “sorrow”. Claessen (1985:171) also notes that “using the right middle finger pointing it back and forth at the right ear to mean ‘yes, yes, I hear what you’re asking but I’m not going to do it.’”, but does not provide the same handedness specificity in many other gestures. In a repertoire of urban South African quotable gestures, Brookes (2004) shows photographs of a young informant gesturing with his right hand as the dominant hand. Brookes explains that she is not aware that there are restrictions on the preferred hand for performing gestures (e-mail to the author, December 8, 2013). In sum, there are previous studies describing gesture handedness, but few are explicit about the permissiveness to switch hands during gesture production. I aim to fill this descriptive gap by identifying the use and significance of handedness in ciTonga quotable gestures.
5.2 Two-handed Symmetry

There are four general structures in ciTonga symmetrical gestures: open palm supine, open palm prone, open palm neutral, and closed fist neutral.

5.2.1 Open Palm Supine

The open palm supine gesture family includes handshapes with all the fingers are more or less spread apart (Kendon 2004). Many open palm supine gestures have a questioning illocutionary function that may be due to metaphorical motivations, linking the “unknown” with “up” (Ochs, Gonzales, and Jacoby 1996). The message content of the open palm supine generally presents a speaker’s idea, as if it were an object on the flat open hand, available for joint inspection (Müller 2004).

Illustration 5.1  *Kulivi X* (to not have X)
In ciTonga, *open palm supine* has the general meaning of “lacking in X”, with X meaning knowledge, money, or other kinds of desired objects; “Ndiziwa ca” [I don’t know] and “ndilivi X” [I don’t have X] are some of the quotable meanings of this gesture. The number and effort of these movements add emphasis to the lacking. For example, a mother might perform the gesture with two hands beating downward to indicate that she does not have enough of a meat or fish side dish that can accompany a Malawian meal. Although both hands should be symmetrical in all parameters, location symmetry does not need to be obeyed if the hands are inhibited, for example, by being in a confined space or positioned on the back of a chair causing the arms to be in different locations (Illustration 5.1, right). In this situation, the gesture is still considered to be in symmetry because without the hindering object, the hands would have been in symmetrical locations. The “lack of X” gesture may be accompanied by a symmetrical shoulder shrug, to specify that the lacking object, X, is some knowledge introduced in the discourse.

When clapping is added to *kulivi X* gesture, the new form emphasizes the lacking is extreme, that the gesturer has nothing at all. Clapping the hands vertically and then laying the palms open, facing up, forms the *kulivi cinthi* (to have nothing) gesture.
Illustration 5.2  *Kulivi cintʰu* (to have nothing)

In variant forms, actual clapping does not need to take place, so long as both palms move toward the center gesture space and then spread apart. A similar gesture has been noted in Western Kenya to suggest “I don’t know”, in which the hands turning from “palm down to palm up” (Creider 1977:D4). While both *kulivi X* and *kulivi cintʰu* gestures suggest the gesturer’s personal attitude toward a situation, they have different pragmatic functions. In the first case, gesturing that one does not have X shows that the person has no solution for a problem and has to move on without it. However, showing that one has nothing, as in the second example, suggests that not only does the gesturer have no solution, but also he or she also want the addressee to do something about it, such as showing sympathy or empathy. The emphatic clapping in the second gesture adds a directive dimension to the *open palm supine*. 
5.2.2 Open Palm Prone

The second group of symmetry has the open palms facing down, or open palm prone. In ciTonga, the palms either face completely down or are turned down at an angle. Open palm prone gestures are typically used in contexts where something is “being denied, negated, interrupted, or stopped, whether explicitly or by implication” (Kendon 2004:248). In ciTonga, I saw open palm prone with similar holophrastic functions, as in the kk‘ana (to refuse) gesture used to refuse the request of an addressee. To produce this gesture, a person positions both palms facing down close to the center gesture space, in the midsection of the upper torso. The palms then move outward quickly, tracing the shape of a large triangle (Illustration 5.3). The kk‘ana gesture is common in many other ethnic groups of Malawi (Mazibuko et al. 2007:19).

Illustration 5.3  Kk‘ana (to refuse)
The *umamp*h*a (very well) gesture contradicts the negative content observe by Kendon (2004). It is also produced by downward facing palms moving away from the body, but that the away motions are smaller compared to *kuk*h*ana*. The place of articulation for *umamp*h*a also differs from *kuk*h*ana*: the hands’ beginning positions are by the sides of the waist, instead of in the central gestural space. This gesture may function as a praise when the person producing the gesturer praises his or her addressee as having done something good, such as making a positive contribution. Illustration 5.4 shows a woman from Kasambala complimenting me for arriving on time for her *cipongo*. The gesture also has an adjectival function when it is used to describe the positive quality of a referent mentioned in the discourse. I saw a woman using *umamp*h*a to say that clothing in the past that are more conservative and better than clothing of today.

Illustration 5.4  *Umamp*h*a (very well)
Another example of open palm prone is the gesture for ŵant'u ŵose (everyone) and its related gesture, ŵana ŵose (every child). This gesture is used to refer to everyone present, everyone in the village, or everyone in the world, depending on the discourse context. The gesture is produced by extending the two arms straight outward forming perpendicular vectors, as depicted in Illustration 5.5 as a school administrator praised his female addressees for attending and organizing a fundraiser for a positive social cause. There are several variant forms of this gesture. First, when the downward facing palms are positioned at the waist level, the gesture refers to ŵana ŵose (every child). This makes sense because children, after all, are shorter than adults. Second, with added up and down “patting” movements, the gesture refers to individuals, such as “each child” or “each person”. The individualizing lexical meaning corresponds to “each” in ciTonga, which is represented as “-moza -moza” [one
one], specific by the noun class prefix of the referent. The reduplicating morphological form of “each” corresponds to the reduplicating movements of the gesture. The third variant is produced by moving the hands to trace a small horizontal circle in front of the gesturer. The handshape can be index finger prone or open palm prone, depending on how specific the gesturer wishes to describe the referred group. Smaller tracings of circles may be used, for example when talking about villages within a hamlet.

5.2.3  Open Palm Neutral

Open palm neutral is formed with forearms positioned in the vertical orientation. This is lexical gesture used to indicate objects that generally have the same girth as a person’s thigh.

Illustration 5.6  Girth of the referent
The gesture may be used to indicate the size of a catfish (*kapango*), by grasping the thigh with two hands as if one is wrapping his or her hands around a plump fish (Illustration 5.6 left), using this gesture to draw a comparison between the size of a leg and the size of the caught fish. They may produce this gesture by holding onto either the left or right thigh. This gesture is often produced by men who are responsible for catching fish, but women also use the same referential system to show the girth of objects. A woman from Yavimba produced a variant form of the gesture as she told a joke about gaining weight. When she produced the gesture, her palms did not touch the thigh but instead were positioned above her extended leg (Illustration 5.6 right). This variation makes sense because women in Malawi typically wear long skirts and *citenje* wraps that limit too much movement. People also use this gesture for the same depictive purpose in Western Kenya (Creider 1977). For example, when people gesture with their “hands held in front, palms parallel and facing each other”, they use it to describe the “size of [a] small or medium object such as [a] gourd”. These gestures are often used to make a gestural picture (Streeck 2008) in ciTonga, people use body parts to demonstrate and refer to another object, using them as available artifacts that aid the explanation of abstract concepts or referents not physically present (Enfield 2005).
5.2.4 Fist Prone and Neutral

Besides open palm handshapes, fists are also used in two-handed symmetrical gestures. There are two orientations of the forearm: prone and neutral. In fists prone, people use the gesture to show that someone or something has a large body, bearing an iconic relationship to a large real-life object (Illustration 5.7). This gesture serves as the basis for other depictions of largeness. For example, people may accompany the gesture by moving their elbows forward and backward. When these movements are incorporated, the gesture turns into a depiction of the walking posture of a big person or a male. A woman in Yavimba created an iconic depiction of the walking style of a large woman by flipping her hands quickly, while holding the palms in vertical orientation. The production of the walking variation of this gesture implies that aTonga are acquainted with the walking styles of both genders.

Illustration 5.7 Cintu cikulu (large object)
An example of *fist neutral* gesture is the lexical gesture for *kuvina* (to dance). Illustration 5.8 from Kavuzi trading center provides such an example as a woman gestured *kuvina* to me, telling me what people do at fundraising parties such as the one to be held the next day. She positioned her fists at waist level and moved the fists in vertical positions from her body side to side.

![Illustration 5.8  Kuvina (to dance)](image)

This gesture has the same movements as it does when actually dancing and it may be considered a dance itself. However, the dance gesture and actual dancing are distinguishable by their form and context of production. Unlike actual dancing, the dance gesture has smaller movements and the elbows and arms do not swing beyond the front gesture space. People can produce the dance gesture alone whenever they wish to depict dancing, but actual dancing in Nk̄ata Bay is typically carried out in a large group, as discussed in chapter 3.
The last example of the fist gestures is *ntazi* (power, energy, or physical strength). To produce this gesture, people form small up and down motions with their fists in the neutral position (Illustration 5.9).

![Illustration 5.9](image)

**Illustration 5.9  Ntazi (power or energy)**

In this example from my fieldwork, a woman from Camawoya village used the gesture to show the health of her friend, who was advanced in age. She used the *ntazi* gesture to compliment her friend’s physical wellbeing. The gesture, like the word *ntazi*, has several meanings. It can depict someone’s good health in a positive way, as in Illustration 5.9, show the strength of a person, or used as a holophrastic gesture to empower the crowd and bring out the “power” and of the people to commit to a cause.
5.3 Two-handed Asymmetry

Asymmetry in two-handed gestures occurs when each hand produces different forms, movements, or locations. When both hands appear to perform identical movements and handshapes, but are in different locations on the vertical axis, the hands are in orientation asymmetry. Asymmetry gestures are produced by a dominant hand carrying out the main movement with the non-dominant hand remaining inactive and forming handshapes that contribute to the semantic content of the gesture.

Illustration 5.10  Nambala zakudololosana (cardinal numbers)
For example, in *nambala zakudololosana* (cardinal counting) collected from my fieldwork, a gesturer in Mzuzu used the index finger of her right dominant hand to tap and single out different fingers on her left hand, with the little finger representing *-kwamba* (first), the ring finger *-wili* (second), and so forth. When she reached to number six, she reversed her gesture handedness and used her left hand as the dominant hand. According to my informants, both left- and right-handers begin cardinal counting with the right hand, but this information requires further verification. This gesture system of counting is the same among Yoruba speakers in West Africa (Orie 2012), but different from the counting gestures of many Anglo-European and East Asian societies. The cardinal counting system could be a Bantu preference in the sub-Saharan region but more data is necessary to verify this claim.

Illustration 5.11  Cardinal counting for a small number
When people count objects that are three (-tatu) or fewer in number, they use a variant counting system. For example, instead of the index finger, the thumb may be used as the articulator, as shown in Illustration 5.11 of a woman’s counting gesture in Camawoya. This counting gesture is typically used to make reference to objects or topics mentioned in the discourse. For example, in this example the woman used the counting gesture to inform her addressees the current market price for one tin of rice. When used as such, the gesture is mainly used for lexical references. People also use the gesture as “beats” that introduce a list of topics that they will present during a discourse, and the gesture becomes a holophrastic expression. A similar gesture is the ndalama (money) gesture, which is performed with the thumb sweeping the upward facing non-dominant palm.

Illustration 5.12  Ndalama (money)
Instead of singling individual fingers, the thumb of the dominant hand scratches the mid region of the non-dominant palm (Illustration 5.12). This gesture has the same real-life movements used for counting a stack of cash. It has both the lexical meaning of references to cash and also pragmatic and holophrastic function of asking the addressee for money.

The next two gestures contain the asymmetrical use of a fist and an open palm. In the first gesture, kubika [nsima] (to cook nsima), the gesturer forms a closed fist with her dominant hand and strikes the palm of her non-dominant hand (Illustration 5.13). In this example from Capongolela, a woman produced the kubika gesture as she narrates a story about a picky husband who would only eat fish that has low fat content. In this case, the gesture is used as a lexical gesture.

Illustration 5.13  *Kubika nsima* (to cook nsima)
The form of the second gesture, *kugut’a* (to be full), is produced by opposite manual configurations: the non-dominant hand forms the closed fist with the thumb side facing up and the dominant produces the *open palm prone* that strikes the top of the fist. I observed this gesture from the master of ceremonies of the fundraiser. She produced *kugut’a* (to be full) to encourage her audience to provide generous financial contributions to support children who do not have the financial resources to attend school. The gesture showed that she wanted the fundraising account to be “full” of donations (Illustration 5.14). The gesture can also be used to describe the situation when an event or building is full of people.

![Illustration 5.14 Kugut’a (to be full of X)](image)

This gesture is used to threaten a beating among the Igbo speakers in Nigeria (personal communication with Olanike Orie on October 15, 2013).
Among Arabic speakers in Lebanon and Syria, the gesture is used to express anger or perform a sexual insult to a chaste woman, expressing that the male gesturer wants to sleep with her (Barakat 1973:772). I also observed the same gesture from a man from Burkina Faso who used the gesture to request that a crowd stop distracting activities. This preliminary comparison of the meaning of *kugut*a suggests that this gesture may be common in many African languages, but the meaning and function differ across culture and language.

Illustration 5.15  *Kuyesa nyama* (to measure the size of a small animal)

Asymmetrical gestures are also used to measure the size of small animals, such as rabbits and mice. To demonstrate the size of animals (*kuyesa nyama*) the dominant hand grabs the inner part of the forearm. The part of the non-dominant hand above of the grabber represents the length of the animal and the
circumference of the arm shows the girth of the animal. In this example, the woman from Mphande household showed me the size of field mice that could be found in her dimba. Like the gesture used to measure the size of a fish, this gesture also uses the non-dominant hand as an available artifact. People use the forearm to represent objects with smaller girth, and use the thigh for objects with larger girth. These types of body-based measurements have been observed among Swahili and Luo speakers, who also use the non-dominant hand as a measuring stick enclosed by the grasp of the dominant hand (Creider 1977; Claessen 1985). All the examples above are collected from physiologically right-handed people, who used their right hand as the dominant hand for gesturing. When I asked a left-handed Tonga informant in Mzuzu to produce these gestures, she produced the gestures in reverse and used her left hand as the dominant articulator. This observation suggests that the dominant hand used to produce asymmetrical gestures reflects the biological handedness of the gesturer.

Illustration 5.16  Kumala (to run out or to be finished)
Orientation asymmetries have different places of articulation and forearm orientation, but otherwise display identical movements. For example, the gesture for *kumala* (to be finished) is produced by sliding two open palms away from each, with the fingers stretched but not spread out. This example from a left-handed gesturer shows his left forearm in prone position but right forearm in supine (Illustration 5.16).

![Illustration 5.17  Kucapa (to wash [clothes])]({})

In the *kumala* gesture, the right palm swipes against the left palm as if to “clean out” everything that is on the hand. The gesture is used when people wish to show that resources have been depleted, and has mainly a semantic function. Unlike *kulivo cint’u*, in which a person produce the gesture to seek empathy from the addressee, *kumala* does not have the same directive function. In terms of the gesture’s handedness, people place their dominant hand on top in prone
position, and non-dominant hand on bottom in supine position.

Another example of orientation asymmetry is *kucapa* (to wash [clothes]), produced with two closed fists rubbing in long strokes against the opposite arms’ inner wrists (Illustration 5.17). During an informal elicitation in Mphande household, the informant made an iconic reference to the actual manual activities that take place when washing clothes by hand. Specifically, the dominant hand was positioned on top in a prone position, to implement force through pushing and scrubbing motions onto a piece of clothing while the non-dominant hand was on the bottom in a supine position, keeping the clothing in place. Gestures have a memory of where the hand is naturally positioned when carrying out the referred real life action. A related gesture, *kulima* (to hoe) is produced with similar movements as *kucapa*. In *kulima*, the fists are in also in orientation asymmetry, one prone, one supine. The hands are held apart in front of the waist and move away to one side, showing an iconic representation of the arm movements when one holds a hoe to till the land.
For *kuyesa* (to measure a quantity of X) gesture, people also place their dominant hand on top in prone orientation and non-dominant hand on bottom in supine. The gesture produced by a man in a dairy proceeding center included a long space between the two hands, as if the right hand were holding the lid of a large heavy canister while the left hand was positioned to support its base (Illustration 5.18). This gesture also mimics the real-life experience of holding a container carrying a large volume of something, such as maize flour.
In the gesture for *kubika [nsima]* (to cook nsima), the hands also mimic the real-life experience of carrying out the action referent. In this example, the hands do not form mirror images but instead are stacked on top of each other. A woman from Kavuzi trading center wanted to know if my ethnographic research also included Tonga methods of cooking *kondoole*, and produced the gesture for cooking a large pot of thick cassava porridge as she questioned me. When grabbing an object with a long handle, such as a paddle or *mdiko* (cooking spatula), the dominant hand naturally falls on the top of the handle with the non-dominant hand below it. In real-life cooking, people switch their hands as one gets tired from stirring, so handedness in this gesture may also vary.

Unlike total asymmetry gestures where the dominant hand always acts out the dominant movement, handedness in orientation asymmetry seems less consistent and the hand on top often does not necessarily correlate to the
dominant hand of the gesturer. Handedness flexibility in orientation
gestures appears to be similar to McManus and Mascie-Taylor’s (1979)
observation that in some two-handed activities, the arm positioned on top does
not necessary correlate with the handedness of the gesture, such as when one
crosses the arms or clasping hands together at the fingers.

5.4 One-handed

Structural constraints of two-handed gestures do not apply to one-handed
gestures. One-handed gestures come in several forms, including with the index
finger pointing up, thumb point up, the fingers forming a bundle, or bending
various fingers, as in the case of ordinal counting.

Illustration 5.20 Nambala zakudondozana (ordinal numbers)
This example produced by a Tonga informant in Mzuzu shows that the counter switched from counting with the right hand to the left once she reached number six (Illustration 5.20). Ordinal counting from the sixth to tenth are mirror images of the first to fifth. However, gestures for sixth to tenth only make sense if they continue from the counting series. In the informant’s counting gesture, she kept her non-dominant hand in relaxed and rotated upward while the dominant hand did the counting.

One-handed quotable gestures often use iconicity to signify a referent. For example, the Tonga informant in Mphande formed the gesture for *munt'ukhazi* (woman) by lightly holding her left breast with the left hand (Illustration 5.21).

![Illustration 5.21: Munt'ukhazi (woman)](image1)

![Illustration 5.22: Munt'ulumi (man)](image2)

![Illustration 5.23: Munt'umula (elder person)](image3)

Her gesture showed an iconic relationship with its referent because she
held the breast as if to make it available for breastfeeding, an activity that only a woman can do. In ciTonga, this gesture is also the gesture for *skulu ya mkaka* (nursery school) using the same reference to breast. The same gesture for “woman” is also used in Yoruba (Orie 2012). The same informant also produced the gesture for *munthulumi* (man), by forming a fist with her right hand and positioning it below her chin to emulate a beard (Illustration 5.22). Like the breast reference, only men can grow a beard so the reference is unambiguous. The same gesture for “man” is also used in Yoruba gesture (Orie 2012), and urban South African gesture (used for “father [male elder]/boyfriend” (Brookes 2004:196,221)). This informant also produced the gesture for *ambuya* (grandfather or grandmother) or *munthu mula* (elder). She extended her right hand and positioned it in front of her body and bent her back to mimic an older person walking with a stick (Illustration 5.23). This gesture is very recognizable among aTonga who frequently produce it during dramatic performances.
The informant also demonstrated the gesture for *kamwana* (small child) by holding her left hand prone at her waist level to indicate the height of the child, as if the hand is containing the head of a small child (Illustration 5.24). If people wish to describe a tall youth, they may raise cupped hands to a higher location, suggesting that the referent is tall but still a child. This gesture is related to *ŵana ŵose* (every child) described above and is used the same way in Western Kenya (Creider 1977:5), in which the gesture for the “height of animal or child” is described as using “right hand flat or slightly cupped, palm down held level parallel to ground” (Creider 1975:5).
The gesture for *kulya* (to eat) also evokes the actual action of consumption. This example from my fieldwork shows a woman in Yavimba forming a “pinching” handshape with her right hand and moving the hand toward the mouth (Illustration 5.25). This structure of the *kulya* gesture provides evidence that forms of many gestures originate from the physical experience of carrying out everyday activities such as eating (Farnell 2004; LeBaron and Streeck 2000; Streeck 2009). The same gesture is used in in Yoruba quotable gesture (Orie 2012). During my fieldwork, I did not observe any situation where someone produced the *kulya* gesture with their left hand. This may imply that the eating gesture obeys the same cultural norm as the actual act of eating that is strongly regulated by the left hand taboo.
To show that there is only a little bit of something, people produce the kamanavi gesture, shown below from my fieldwork, by positioning fingers close to the thumb, leaving a little space between them. The space between the index finger and the thumb refers to the quantity of the referred object. This is an adjectival gesture. If the fingers leave no space between them, then the finger bunch gesture forms the money for ndalama (money). The one-handed ndalama (money) gesture, as opposed to the two-handed gesture described in the previous section, is represented by positioning the right forearm in the vertical orientation, bundling the fingers together and then sliding the four fingers against the inner surface of the thumb. The money gesture has different pragmatic functions depending on whether it is articulated with or without a verbal counterpart. When produced alone, however, the ndalama gesture is used to either subtly suggest that a third person present has money, or to accuse a
second person interlocutor of having money and not sharing it with the
gesturer. Either the right or left hand can be used to produce the ndalama
(money) and kamanavi (a little) gestures.

CiTonga has two different gestures used for swearing. A comparison of
quotable gestures in six countries show that insulting gestures make up around
80 percent, suggesting the prevalence of these gestures (Brookes 2014a; Kendon
1981). The first swear, shown in Illustration 5.28 from Camawoya, is produced
with a snap of the fingers in midair by the shoulder of the gesturing hand and
suggests that the swearer may have little evidence for what he or she is swearing.

![Illustration 5.28](image)
**Illustration 5.28 Kusokola**
(to swear with minimal evidence)

![Illustration 5.29](image)
**Illustration 5.29 Kusokola**
(to swear wholeheartedly)

The person producing this gesture usually wishes to solemnly attest to a
claim for which she has minimal evidence or is lying about, for example when
someone reports a piece of gossip but tells it as if he or she witnessed the event.
The second swearing gesture *kusokola*, also taken from Camawoya but produced by a different woman, is produced by making a swiping motion, as if slitting the throat, with a downward facing open palm. People who use the second type of swearing typically claim that they believe wholeheartedly what they say is true. The two swearing gestures request different responses from their recipient. In the first case, swearing with minimal evidence, the gesturer does not expect people to believe what has been said. Instead, the gesture seeks empathy from the recipient. In the second case, swearing wholeheartedly, the gesturer wants people to believe what they say and is willing to bet their life on the claim’s truth, hence the neck slicing movement. Neither gesture form presupposes that the gesturer is actually telling the truth; rather each shows a different level of commitment to a claim. In Nkʰata Bay, people only produce swearing gestures among familiar peers; no one swears in front of people who are in a deferential position. Since it is not a gesture to “impress,” its handedness comes from the natural preference of the gesturer or the spatial location of its targeted audience. For example, in Camawoya I noticed right-handed woman, who used her right hand to count cardinal numbers (Figure 5.7 left), but on a different day used her left hand to swear, because she addressed the gesture to her sister sitting on her left hand side (Figure 5.7 right). It appears that handedness is determined not by the Tonga sociocultural preference, but instead,
the physical context in which the gesture is produced. In the swearing gesture, the gesturer used her left hand dominantly because her audience is situated closer to the left side of her body.

![Figure 5.6](image.png)

**Figure 5.6** A woman used her right hand to count, but left to swear

During natural speech, people may switch their hands in the same discourse to distinguish separate utterances. My informant explained how to perform the gestures for drinking *mowa*, a traditional Malawian beer made of the same maize or millet flour used to cook *nsima*, and drinking water. For example, the Mphande informant distinguished the gestures for drinking alcohol and drinking water:

1  Ah... *ku-mwa-mowa na ku-k’amb-a vyo*  
   | 5.29 |
   ah...15-drink-beer 1SG 15-speak-FV like this  
   ‘ah to drink beer, we gesture like this’
2  *kweni asani muntʰu  ṃa-tam-a*
   | 5.30  |  
   CONJ when 1.man  1-sick-FV  
   ‘but when someone is sick’

3  *mu-ndi-paske-ku  maji*  
   | 5.31  |  
   2PL.SBJ-1SG.OBJ-give-to  water  
   ‘[they say] can you give me some water’

4  *wɔ-kamb-a  vyo*  
   | 5.32  |  
   3SG-say-FV like this  
   ‘they gesture like this’

Illustration 5.30  *Kumwa mowa*  
(to drink beer/alcohol)

Figure 5.7  Resting position

Illustration 5.31  *Kupaskeni* (to plead)

Illustration 5.32  *Kumwa maji*  
(to drink water)
She used the conjunction *kweni* (but) to change from the topic of drinking beer and then provided a different context for drinking by saying, “*asani munt‘u watama*” [when someone is sick] (line 2). After the right hand produced *kumwa mowa* (to drink alcohol), she moved it to her chest while holding the left hand in resting position. Next, she changed her voice from that of an explainer of gesture to the voice of a sick person and said, “*mundipaskeku maji*” [can you give me some water] (line 3). She accompanied this line with a pleading gesture produced by her right hand. Finally, she switched back to the voice of the explainer and offered the gesture of drinking water (line 4). The gesture for *kumwa maji* (to drink water) is identical to how water is consumed in Nk’ata Bay, producing a cup shape with the bending of the palm while holding the fingers close together. This informant’s explanation shows that a single individual may alternate the handedness used to produce gestures on different occasions, or even during the same discourse. She changed her articulator from right to left in order to contrast two distinct entities (the one/the other) and perhaps their dichotomous opposition: drinking beer is “bad” for health, but when a person is sick and wants to get better, water, something “good” for health, is requested. Therefore, changing hands expresses a relation of equivalence between two terms linked to the notion of equilibrium (Calbris 2008).
5.5 Summary

Quotable gestures use stable forms to systematically signify a referent. As symbols, quotable gestures are assigned arbitrarily to their referent; as indexes, they highlight attributes associated with the referent; and as icons, they depict properties of the referent. I presented examples of 32 quotable gestures observed from my fieldwork in Nkata Bay in 2012. The distribution of handedness in the incidences observed is summarized in Table 5.1 below. Based on data, I showed that the right hand tended to be the dominant articulator, but whether it is a result of the handedness of the gesturer or gesture convention is still unclear.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Right</th>
<th>Left</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Both/R</th>
<th>Both/L</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Symmetry</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymmetry</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>25%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two-handed symmetrical gestures seem to converge on two polarized semantic categories: positivity, including expressions like ũantu or ũana Òose and ntwzai; and negativity, such as kukana. Yoruba speakers in Nigeria also use two-handed symmetrical gestures to show negation (Orie and Sanders 2013). All the fist-clenching gestures taken together seem to relate to the physicality and presence of the referent. The meaning of by two-handed gestures have an
emphatic content. Perhaps because gesturing with the thumbs down produces an awkward configuration of the arms, there is no ciTonga quotable gesture formed by the thumb side pointing down. As shown in the illustrated examples above, two-handed symmetrical gestures cover a range of semantically significant concepts, and both the right and left hands have equal communicative functions (Figure 5.8).

![Figure 5.8 Meaning and form of nine symmetrical gestures](image)

Following the dominance constraint, handedness in asymmetrical gestures reflect the physiological hand preference of the gesturer. For example, in asymmetrical gestures, right-handers would use the right hand as their main articulator, while the left hand serves a non-dominant position. Left-handers, on the other hand, follow the opposite pattern (Figure 5.9).
In all orientation asymmetry quotable gestures, the dominant hand tends to be placed in the same location as if it would be in the real life context that the gesture is representing (Figure 5.10).

Many of these gestures are derived from the practical actions of their referents and therefore, have the same handedness as them. These practical actions are acquired through socialization and education, and as such, they are not typically true indicators for an individual’s hand preference. Therefore, the handedness for these two gestures may also be established by the ciTonga convention of preferring the right hand. In all asymmetrical gestures, a switch of handedness does not produce gestures with a different meaning, hence
handedness choices are in free variation and there is a degree of flexibility for asymmetrical gestures. In one-handed gestures, hand preference appears to be chosen by convenience in context and for discourse functions (Figure 5.12). People gesture with the hand that is closer to the addressee and switch hands to distinguish different referents. One exception to the free variation is the kulya gesture, in which only the right hand can be used. This is because the referent, eating nsima, must be carried out by the right hand.

![Figure 5.11 One-handed gestures](image)

Quotable gestures in ciTonga shift to variant forms if there are physical constraints in the discourse context. For example, the canonical gesture for kulivi is produced by two hands positioned at equal heights in front of the central gesture space of the gesturer. When there is an object constricting this gesture
space, people may shift the gesture to accommodate. The hands in the
variant gestures are not produced in the same location, but this variation does
not produce different meaning (Figure 5.12).

![Canonical vs Variant Gestures](image)

**Figure 5.12** Variant forms from environmental factors

There are other variations based on different attributes of the referent. For
example, the -kulu (large) gesture is produced by two fists and wide bent elbows.
Based on this canonical form, people produced creative forms such as the gesture
for a large man walking and the gesture for large woman walking. These forms
are not in free variations (Figure 5.13).

![Canonical vs Variant Gestures](image)

**Figure 5.13** Variant forms from same semantic origin
6 Handedness in Pointing Gestures

Pointing gestures are ubiquitous across human societies. Pointing is a marked body movement that projects a vector toward an object in a way that signifies it as something requiring special attention and interpretation (Eco 1976). In this way, pointing gestures produce indexical relationships between signs and their objects (Pierce 1967) that are used in non-linguistic expressions such as painting and graphical design, and through gestures. How a pointing gesture is produced and interpreted depends on its sociocultural context. In Ghana, for example, a taboo against left-handed activities requires that people use their right hand even when pointing to the left (Kita and Essegbey 2001). In this chapter, I examine whether the left hand taboo in Malawi is also applied to pointing gestures in the domain of spontaneous talks.

6.1 Background

Pointing plays a role in how people think and interact in socially situated contexts (Hanks 1999; Kita 2003). Because of their reliance on index, almost all gesture literature considers pointing a separate class from other gestures (Efron 1972; Ekman and Friesen 1981; McNeill 1992; Wundt 1973). Pointing begins early
in human development and children acquire pointing as their first type of gesture (McNeill 1992) at between eight and twelve months of age (Bates 1976; Bates 1979) using pointing gestures to communicate before they can even talk (Iverson and Goldin-Meadow 2005; Liszkowski 2006). Among infants, the right hand is used more frequently to point, even among children who would otherwise use the left hand to grasp (Esseily, Jacquet, and Fagard 2011).

Pointing gesture are also known as deictics because they use people contextual cues (Gumperz 1982) to draw attention to referents outside the “here and now” of the gesturer (Bühler 1982; Nunberg 1993). The correct interpretation of a pointing gesture requires the recipient and gesturer to have the same “common ground” (Enfield and Levinson 2006) thinking like each other. A pointing reference therefore depends on understanding other people’s intentions and the “ability to participate with others in collaborative activities with shared goals and intentions” (Tomasello et al. 2005:1).

Some believe that pointing form is directly related to how people want to refer to the pointed target (Kendon and Versante 2003). Often, the form of a pointing gesture reveals how the gesturer wishes the indicated object to be regarded (Kendon Versante 2003). For instance, when pointing at deferential objects, such as an elderly person, many societies require the use of special handshapes to show respect and fulfill the social-affiliational imperative present in
all human interactions (Enfield 2009; Heritage and Raymond 2005), the requirement for participants to follow local social norms in order to avoid offending others (Enfield, Kita, and de Ruiter 2007). To shape a reference, pointing gestures depend on markedness, or salient expressions that draw attention to something out of the ordinary about the referent and force the addressee to consider elements in the current context that may influence them to consider their interpretation differently (Schegloff 2007; Enfield and Stivers 2012). Current studies are aware of at least one way that people accomplish this: the use of different pointing sizes (Enfield, Kita, and de Ruiter 2007). There are two general sizes used in manual pointing gestures: big points (B-point), produced by a manual articulator that includes a fully extended arm, with elbows raised; and small points (S-points), produced by an articulator that is not fully extended and requires less physical effort to produce (Enfield, Kita, and de Ruiter 2007).

![Figure 6.1  B- and S-points in ciTonga](image-url)
CiTonga pointing gestures also appear to distinguish between these two sizes (Figure 6.1). In the illustration on the right, a man from a dairy processing center in Kavuзи made an S-point “hidden” referent to another man standing outside. He bent his left arm so that he could tug his right index finger close to his chin. His left arm grabbed onto his upper right arm, as if to suppress any additional movements from it. In the illustration on the left, a young man from Capongolela extended his right arm and index finger straight out to order his younger brother to bring more firewood over to the *mpala*. Pointing size variation is related to the pragmatic function of an action that includes the pointing gesture (Enfield 2009b). For example, B-points often offer information that may be independent from the verbal information and even contribute more to the meaning of a multimodal utterance (Enfield 2009b). S-points, on the contrary, tend to link functionally to verbal utterances, and often present a referent that might have already been identified in a different context (Enfield 2009b). People use B-points to gather the joint attention of participants and to inform them of an object visible in their perceptual field (Enfield, Kita, and de Ruiter 2007), fulfilling an *informational imperative* that requires speakers to provide sufficient information for the referent during the discourse (Enfield, Kita, and de Ruiter 2007; Schegloff 2007). People use S-points when they are not sure whether or not the addressee can identify the referent, or when they want to
“say” something in secret and do not want the referent to “hear” them,
as in the case illustrated in Figure 6.1 left. This inconspicuous feature of S-points
can be exploited when a gesturer does not want to offend the addressee by
“doing more than necessary” and making the assumption that people cannot
figure out the referents themselves, also fulfilling the social-affiliational imperative
(Enfield, Kita, and de Ruiter 2007).

Pointing forms, such as handshape and the use of non-manual articulators,
are conventionalized and associated with precise lexical meaning that only
members of the same speech community can understand (Kendon and Versante
2003; Orie 2009; Sherzer 1991; Wilkins 2003). Among the Arrente of Australia,
there are many different pointing handshapes that distinguish different spatial
features of the referent. For example, a “horned” pointing gesture produced by
the index and little finger sticking out with all others contracted and the forearm
in the prone position is used to show the motion of an object going off toward a
place (Wilkins 2003). Wilkins shows that pointing with the index finger is not the
default handshape of the Arrente people, contradicting the assumption that
index finger pointing might be a universal property in human communication.
Different pointing forms also perform different pragmatic functions. For
example, Yoruba speakers in West Africa use an ambiguous handshape with
both the thumb and index finger extended, but only a Yoruba would know that
the thumb is the pointer in this case, and not the more common index finger (Orie 2009). Pointing with the left hand is restricted to show politeness in many sub-Saharan African societies. For instance, Yoruba speakers have strong distaste for left-handed pointing and “omo ale ni o n fi owo osi juweile e baba e” [it is only a bastard who uses the left hand to describe/point to his father’s house] (Orie 2009:238). People are exempt from the taboo when the right hand is clearly disabled or occupied, or when giving directions where pointing gestures co-occur with verbalization of “left” (Orie 2009). Essegbey (2014) and Kita and Essegbey (2001) show that in Ghana, the left hand is also suppressed in pointing for politeness reasons, but only under certain circumstances, such as when giving directions to a stranger. Many Malawians also tell me that pointing handshapes show how people perceive the social status and footing of their referents.

Illustration 6.1  Eyebrow flashing in ciTonga
Many societies use non-manual articulators for pointing (Anderson 2006), including the lips (Sherzer 1973; Enfield 2001), nose (Orie 2009), and eyes (Goodwin 1980; Kendon 1967; Streeck 1993). This is documented in the literature as early as 1982 when it was noted that an eye gaze, combined with a subtle movement of the head, can be used to produce a secret, inconspicuous indication (De Jorio 2000). In ciTonga, *kulongo* (to point) typically refers to deictic actions of the hands or by an object held by the hands. However, one can also lift the eyebrows by moving the forehead *cipumi*, as shown in Illustration 6.1 based on a woman’s gesture in Kasambala. This eyebrow “flash” has an anaphoric function and is used to draw attention to a referent previously identified in an earlier discourse. The verbal counterpart of this deictic gesture may be, for example, *uja* (the one that you know what I am talking about).

**CiTonga Deictics**

In the verbal medium, deictic utterances include grammatical categories such as the demonstratives “here” and “there”, and pronouns. Deictic words are often semantically ambiguous and typically involve some other type of reference (Levinson 2007), often pointing. How people describe object locations in space reveals how they conceptualize spatial relationships (Levinson 1996, 2003; Talmy 2000). Spatial expressions and their grammatical properties are closely tied to the
sociocultural context because speech relies on mutual social
engagements (Hanks 1990). When pointing, aTonga often use demonstratives
that specify the location of the object from the location of the speaker and
addressee, and locatives that identify where they are in relation to other objects.
CiTonga demonstratives correspond to one of the 18 noun classes to which the
referent may belong. The canonical forms of the five demonstratives are
presented in the second column from the left in Table 6.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEMONSTRATIVES</th>
<th>At</th>
<th>On</th>
<th>In</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immediate</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘this one’</td>
<td>kunu</td>
<td>panu</td>
<td>munu</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘unu’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>‘here’</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>kunu</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>‘right on here’</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>panu</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>‘inside here’</td>
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<tr>
<td>munu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Near</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘this one’</td>
<td>uku</td>
<td>apa</td>
<td>umu</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘on this here’</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>uyu</td>
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<td>‘this here’</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘in this area’</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>‘on this here’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Far</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>‘that one’</td>
<td>uko</td>
<td>apo</td>
<td>umo</td>
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<td>‘on that there’</td>
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<td>uyo</td>
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<td>‘that there’</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘in that area’</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘on that there’</td>
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<tr>
<td>yo</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘at that area’</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘on that spot’</td>
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<td>Far</td>
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<td>‘that one you know’</td>
<td>ko</td>
<td>po</td>
<td>muwa</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘at, you know’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anaphoric</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘that one you know’</td>
<td>kuja</td>
<td>pada</td>
<td>muja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘on, you know’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘in, you know’</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Unu is used when the referent is in the same location or the same
immediate area as the origo. Its variant, kunu (here) is frequently used in
figurative speech such as “here in this village”, or “here in this compound”. Panu
belongs to class 16 and means “on”, as in “on this table where we are”. Munu
belongs to class 18 and means “in”, as in “in this house where we are currently
sitting”. *Uyu* is used when the referent is near the position of the speaker, especially when it is visible and somewhat within reach. *Uyo* is used when the referent is not within reach and would require the speaker to walk to it. *Yo* is used when the referent is very far away and cannot be reached from the position of the speaker by walking. *Uja* is used when the referent location is defined in a prior discourse. It supposes that the audience knows this location.

### 6.2 Four Multimodal Interactions

I present here four instances of spontaneous talks in which pointing gesture play a major role. In the first example, I will recount a Tonga woman describing the villages in Nḳata Bay to me, a woman and a non-Tonga visiting her home. In the second example, I describe two people explaining the *mwambu wa ciTonga* (Tonga tradition) of chieftainship to me, at that time a non-Tonga living with the speakers’ relative. In the third interaction, I will show a young man telling his family of a witchcraft incident in Camawoya. In the last example, I will present a young woman’s narrative of her journey from Karonga back to Kavuzi as she visited her friends in the Mphande household.

#### 6.2.1 Villages in Nḳata Bay

In July 2012, a woman in the Mphande household described to me the
territories belonging to different chiefs in Nkata Bay using a combination of ciTonga, English, and pointing gestures. She first defined the territory of Group Village Headman Camawoya (Illustration 6.2).

She did so by waving her left arm in a prone position and saying, “cose ce GVH Camawoya” [all of this belongs to GVH Camawoya...]. Her arm made a narrow sweep with the fingers loosely extended. She retracted her left hand and restarted by identifying the location of another nearby village, Vimbaso. She said, “and another one, big stream...” (Illustration 6.3), producing another stroke with her left index finger prone in a B-pointing size. Her left index finger showed the location of the stream and identified the place as the territory of GVH Vimbaso. She lowered her head and said “GVH...” while holding her left arm in
the hold phase. When she looked back up she finished the sentence

with the name of another village, “Vimbaso”. Next, she identified a different

village called Uwafwa. She kept her left hand in midair but modified the gesture

by moving other fingers upward, making an “away” movement in *open palm

prone* position (Illustration 6.4). With this she said, “*uku GVH Uwafwa*” [over

there is GVH Uwafwa]. Finally, she said, “*kunena ku... kufika ku tarmac*” [up there,

arriving at the tarmac road…]. With this description, she modified her left hand

again into a *supine* position that tilted up at a 45 degree angle (Illustration 6.5).

The first time she said “*kunena ku*” [over there in the high altitude area] she

extended her hand in a quick motion. When she continue and said, “*ku tarmac*”
[over to the tarmac road], she repeated the gesture but extended the arm further out, suggesting that the tarmac road is far away from Uwafwa. Next, she described the location of another village, Kamsita, relative to the location of Cifila. She raised her left hand in open palm neutral, with the fingers extended straight out, and said “along the tarmac” (Illustration 6.6). The open palm neutral became an icon representing the M5 road. She then moved her left hand outward and said “Cifila is down…” (Illustration 6.7). She rotated her arm to show the location of Cifila village relative to the tarmac road.

Illustration 6.6  Along the tarmac  Illustration 6.7  Cifila is down

The hand representing the M5 tarmac road became a positional marker for the location of Cifila. The orientation of the hand showed that Cifila is to the left of the M5 road. After she defined the location of Cifila, she said, “this hilly area…” while moving her right arm up in open palm neutral (Illustration 6.8). She
made two long horizontal strokes with her right hand, tracing the outline of a mountain that matched her verbal description of a hilly area. She located Kamsita village by alternating the gesture with her left and right arm.

![Illustration 6.8](image)

**Illustration 6.8  This hilly area**

In the beginning, the woman gestured with her left hand to direct her body and face toward me. After she described the location of Cifila relative to M5, she shifted her gesturing arm from left to right. The hand switch allowed her to show two referents facing one another. She used six left-handed pointing gestures and only one right-handed gesture.

6.2.2  Tonga Chieftainship

The next interaction took place during an informal conversation in Cifila, July 2011. A woman and her male older cousin took turns to explain to me the
matrilineal preference in Tonga chieftainship selection. The woman’s mother was also present but remained a silent observer. The speakers perhaps realized that their addressee had difficulty comprehending the language or the content and gestured frequently (Goldin-Meadow and Alibali 2013). The woman presented her understanding of chieftainship selection by establishing characters to aid her explanation. She did so by pointing out and identifying her mother and cousin as plausible characters.

1  *Mwana ſaku aŋa*
   1.child 1.ASOC LOC.1
   ‘her child’

2  *(1.2) amalume ſinu si uncle is my uncle eti (0.3)*
   2.uncle 1.POSS CONJ Q
   ‘is my uncle…. right?’

She formed her first stroke by raising her right hand as an *open palm prone* and placing it on the right shoulder of her mother (Illustration 6.9). Instead of directing attention, this contact *placed* her mother as the focus of her audience’s attention (Clark 2003).
Illustration 6.9  *Mwana ŵaku aŵa*  (the child of this one)

Through this composite expression, she introduced a narrative framework based on real-life artifacts and relationships (Enfield 2003; 2005). Next, she summarized her explanation by forming three different pointing gestures with her index finger and saying (line 3):

3  aŵisi aŵu aŵa, asibweni angu ine, azici aŵu aŵa
2.father 2.ASOC.LOC.1 2. uncle 2.1SG.POS 1SG 2.brother 2.ASOC.LOC.1
|       6.10 |       6.10 |       6.10 |
‘his father is my uncle, is her brother.’

4  sonu ndi-titi ufumu eti
now 1SG-say 14.chief Q
|       6.11 |
‘now I mentioned the chief right?’

5  ndiye ufumu uŵa u-turwa ŵaku
CONJ 14.chief 14.LOC 14-goes to LOC.17
|       6.12 |
‘now this chieftaincy goes to…’
First she pointed at the torso of her cousin in a B-point, next she pointed at herself, and finally she pointed at her mother in an S-point (Illustration 6.10).

Illustration 6.10  *Aŵisi* (father), *asibweni* (uncle), and *azici* (brother)

Illustration 6.11  *Ndititi*

ufumu
(I discuss the chief)

Illustration 6.12  *Ufumu uŵa*

(this chief)

Illustration 6.13  Retraction

After mapping out this relationship, she concluded her explanation by restating the topic (line 4), producing two circles with a webbed hand as if to
encircle and summarize the information she had presented above (Illustration 6.11). This circling gesture suggested an intention to gather and summarize information (Poggi and Pelachaud 2008). Her gesture circle also created a new spatial domain not inhabited by any real life object, thus forming a phantom referent. Following this gesture, she produced another stroke by raising her right index finger, in an S-point, and directing it in front of her at a point within this circle (Illustration 6.12). She did so while saying, “ufunu uywa” [this chief]. At this point of the discourse, she appeared hesitant in her explanation because she retracted her gesturing hand from the discourse domain and turned to look at her cousin.

6 mwambu ṭwa ciTonga ngwa kuti
   INTJ 3.tradition 3.ASSOC 6.Tonga 3.say CONJ
   6.14
   ‘the Tonga tradition says that’

7 azici aku yaŵa ada aku ine
   2.brother 2.ASOC 2.LOC 2.father 2.ASOC 1SG
   6.15
   ‘her brother is my father’

Seeing his cousin’s signal of conclusion, the male cousin continued the explanation by restating the topic (line 6). With his upper left arm resting on his raised bent left knee, he extended his left arm into the discourse domain
(Illustration 6.14) to draw attention to what he was about to say. He 
offered new character assignments and said that his father was his aunt’s brother 
(line 7). Keeping his gaze at me, he raised his left index finger in B-point and 
aimed it at his aunt. He moved the same gesture to his chest, saying “azici aku 
Yaŵa, ada aku ine” [the brother of this one is the father of me].

![Illustration 6.14 Mwambu ŵa ciTonga ngwa kuti](image)
(The Tonga tradition says that)

![Illustration 6.15 Azici aku yaŵa, ada aku ine](image)
(the brother of this one is my father)

He proposed a hypothetical situation of the chief dying (line 8), saying, 
“kenaka ŵafwa” [then she died], using his left index and middle fingers to move 
the character represented by his aunt out of the discourse domain (Illustration 
6.16).
After showing the death of the old chief, he indicated that the female descendant would become the next chief. He pointed at his cousin with his left index finger and then pointed to the point in space representing the narrational chief. He said, “yaịa, atongi ufumu” [this one taking over the throne]. He relied
on his cousin’s narrative framework to layout his own explanation regarding the selection of chief. The woman’s explanation suggested that the son would be chief, but man’s explanation showed that the daughter of the deceased chief would come into power. In this interaction, the woman produced 15 right-handed pointing gestures and the man produced 14 left-handed gestures.

6.2.3 Witchcraft Story

The third interaction took place in July 2012 in Camawoya. A young man shared his knowledge of a witchcraft incident to his family. Five family members gathered around the paduli, outdoor area that also serves as a family living space.
The father sat in the upper left hand corner, weaving reed baskets, his mother and wife sat on *vipuna* in the middle, the two sons sat in the shade breaking and chewing sugarcanes and the daughter-in-law, not pictured, moved back and forth to complete her house chores (Illustration 6.18). Initially, the younger son who was the main speaker held a knife with his right hand to cut the sugarcane held by his left so he produced no gestures. He only lifted his gaze from time to time to look at his father, his main addressee.

The younger son recounted the arrest of a man accused of witchcraft, a serious offense in Malawi (Manda 1987). He explained the trip of a man named Mwalemwale (line 1 and line 3), who claimed to be leaving for Johannesburg (line 2) for one week (line 4):
Instead of going to Johannesburg, however, Mwalemwale actually went to Mozambique (line 5) so that he and his people could hire a witchdoctor (line 6).

Mwalemwale returned to Malawi with a witchdoctor to put a spell on a person’s house (lines 7 and 8).

Mwalemwale recently said he left‘Mr. Mwalemwale recently said he left’

‘he went o Johannesburg’

‘so recently Mr. Mwalemwale left’

‘he stayed one week’

Gazes at Father

he and his people could hire a witchdoctor (line 6).

Mwalemwale returned to Malawi with a witchdoctor to put a spell on a person’s house (lines 7 and 8).
8  *yi-ngu-ci-jal-a pa-nyumba pa*
9-DPST-PST-seal-FV 16-house 16.LOC
‘he sealed the house [with medicine]’

9  *pa-nyumba paku yani?*
16-house 16-to whom
‘on whose house?’

At this point, the father asked his son, “*panyumba paku yani*” [on whose house]? The son answered, “*paku Simoni*” [on Simon’s house] (line 10). He added that the witchdoctor called people over so they could learn the proper behaviors for frequenting the bewitched house (line 11). The father asked his son the location of this village (line 12). The son knocked the cane on the ground to break off a section, he lifted it up, and used it to point behind while saying, “*ku Nkʰata*” [to Nkʰata Bay] (Illustration 6.21).
10 *paku Simoni*
16-to Simon
‘Simon’s house’

11 *so ya-jal-a ng’anga yi-ya yi-ngu-cem-a wànt’hu wòse*
CONJ 9-seal-FV witchdoctor 9-DEM 9-DPST-call for-FV 2.person 2.all
‘so the house was sealed by the witchdoctor, then he called everyone’

12 *pa-muzi pa*
16-village 16.LOC
‘in that village there?’

13 *so a-titi wé-ndi mu-bali wàwú-so ku-Nk’ata*
| 6.21 |
CONJ 2-say 2-CONJ 12-relative 2.PDEM-also 15-Nk’ata
“so they say they also have their (one) relative in Nk’ata (Bay)”

He tried to recall the name of the person (line 14) by saying that the man owned a large motorcycle and liked to ride it on the tarmac just behind their home (line 15), and gesturing the large size of the motorcycle (Illustration 6.22).

14 **B:** *a-titi yani kwali?*
2-say whom I don’t know
‘he said whom, I don’t know.’

15 **B:** *wà-t-enda pa-ci-njinga vyo wà-t-anja ku-za penapa*
2-HAB-travel 15-18-bike 2-HAB-like 15-come right here
| 6.22 | 6.23 |
‘he often comes with his bike, he likes coming right here.’

16 **B:** *ci-njinga waka vyo ca-kutowa ci-ya wà-njoiyanga-njoiyanga*
| 6.22 |
18-bike just like this 18-beautiful 18-DEM 2-playing around-RED
‘the bike is simply very beautiful, they always play around with it’
The son made a side point with his thumb in an S-point when he mentioned the location of motorcycle play (Illustration 6.23) and gave up trying to remember the name of the owner of the motorcycle (line 17).

17  a… a-ngu-kamb-a kweni
   INTJ 2-DPST-say-FV  but
   ‘he said the name but I don’t know’

Illustration 6.23 Penapa
(right there)

Illustration 6.24 Yaku mweneyoyo
(that person [you should know])

He continued to say that the witchdoctor and a man named Mr. Vweli cast a spell on a house (line 18) checking his audience’s attention by asking them whose house had received the magic spell. He gave a hit by pointing behind him (line 19), and after hearing no response, repeated the gesture and said “Yaku mweneyoyo” [that person you should know] (Illustration 6.24).
so a-titi ng’anga yi-ya a-ngu-sok-a nayu aVweli
CONJ 2-say witchdoctor 9-DEM 2-DPST-leave-FV 2.POSS 2.Vweli
’so they say the witchdoctor and Mr. Vweli should leave...’

kuti a-ka-jal-i nyumba y-aku yani?
| 6.24 |
that 2-go-close-SUBJ 9.house 9-ASSOC whom?
’go and close whose house?’

yaku mweneyo-yo
| 6.24 |
9-of that person-ANF
’of that person there’

The father could not figure it out so he asked for the answer (line 21). The
son gave up and identified someone from Nk’ata Bay (line 22), while repeating
the backward point (Illustration 6.24).

yani?
who?
’which one?’

wa-ku Nk’ata yo
| 6.24 |
2-to Nk’ata DDEM
’that person in Nk’ata Bay’

In this account, the speaker produced 26 right-handed pointing gestures;
three were identical because his addressee had trouble identifying the referent.
He also produced six left-handed gestures and eleven two-handed gestures.
6.2.4  Journey back from Karonga

In July 2012, a woman recounted her journey from Karonga back to Kavuzi to her friend and the friend’s mother in Mphande. At this point in the story, her bus had broken down (line 1) and she had to decide whether or not to leave the bus and go to her sister’s, which would cost her an additional 500 kwaca (line 2).

1  *Galimoto ndi Costa i- ngu-nangi-kiya pa-Uliwa*  
9.automobile CONJ Coaster 9-DPST-breakdown-CAUS 16-Uliwa  
‘the coaster had broken down on Uliwa’

2  *ku-tuwapo ndi kwa- j-a akulu five hundred kwaca*  
17-from CONJ 17-stay-FV 2.elder five hundred kwaca  
‘from there to where my older sister stays costs 500 mk’

3  *one o’clock pa-nthowa pa-Cipululu*  
16-path 16-Cipululu  
‘one o’clock, on the way to Cipululu’

4  *ti-yamb-engi ku-kwel-a*  
1PL-begin-DFUT 15-climb-FV  
‘we were starting to climb’

5  *ujeni ku-mapili nga Ciweta ta-jump-a kuwa thing 15-6.mountain CONJ Ciweta 1PL-PERF-pass-FV DEM*  
‘we passed the Ciweta mountain over there’

6  *four o’clock*  
1  

7  *five o’clock*  
1  
As she said five hundred kwaca (line 2), she slapped her right hand against her left hand, positioned at that time on the back of a chair (Illustration 6.25). Her right hand slapped the left, reacting with an emphatic beat, a common gesture in Malawi (Banda 2006). After this, she continued to describe the bus movement in Cipululu, “pantłowa pa Cipululu” [on the road in Cipululu] (line 3), using her left hand to depict the motion of the bus traveling on the road (Illustration 6.26).
She said, “tiyambeni ko kwela” [we started to climb] (line 4), and manipulated her left hand so that the fingers bent outward. She transformed her left hand and arm into the motion and path of a bus moving up a winding road.

Her addressee asked her whether this happened in the morning or the afternoon (line 8). The speaker responded by saying, “afternoon” (line 9), and extending her right palm out (Illustration 6.26). The speaker’s pointing gestures during her informal story telling suggest she had no handedness. The choice of the gesturing hand depends on the physical convenience of the gesturer and the readiness of the hand to gesture. She produced two-right handed and two-left handed gestures in the segment presented above.
6.3 Pointing Forms

I will now present the most commonly used pointing forms from the narrated interactions above and describe others that I noticed in other interactions. The handshapes to be discussed include pointing with the index finger, pointing with the palm, and pointing with other handshapes.

6.3.1 Index Finger: Right and Left Hand

In addition to having big and small pointing sizes, the index finger handshapes can be further classified by the forearm orientation of the gesturer (see section 3.5 for more detailed description).

\textit{Index Finger Prone}

People often use an \textit{index finger prone} when they wish to “single out an object which is to be attended to as a particular object” (Kendon 2004:205), or “object individuation” (Kendon 2004:205). This handshape allows the speaker to highlight the pointed target or place it as a topic important for a later discourse (Kendon and Versante 2003). When producing the gesture in the prone position, people tend to raise the index finger from rest while either tightly contracting the other fingers toward the inner palm or loosely hanging them downward.
In the ciTonga *index finger prone*, people place the thumb out of the grasp of other fingers and relax it so that it is in the same direction as the pointing index finger. In Illustration 6.29 from Camawoya, a woman extended her right arm in a B-point to single out her small son as the one in trouble out of a group of other children playing around, for playing with a ball on the M5, the major road in Nkhata Bay where many fast lorries drive by. She used her right hand to carry out the directive function that ordered her son to stop what he was doing. As an adult and the mother of the pointed target, the woman had the power to discipline and warn using her index finger. This warning gesture is prevalent in other African societies. For example, among Yoruba speakers, people use *index finger prone* and move the gesturing hand up and down to give its warning meaning (Orie 2009). Pointing with an index finger directly at someone’s face suggests accusation, and Malawians consider directing such gestures toward
adults to be extremely offensive. The specific condition for index finger point constrains and enables people to show their social relationship with one another and the world around them (Hanks 2005).

The next example shows a young man in Capongolela directing his younger brother to bring more firewood to the fire pit because the *mpala* was getting cold again during the *cipwepwe* (cold season). He said the following while directing his index finger at different referents identified in the discourse:

1  *Iwê ka-t- o jani la ma-peyala kuwa*
   | 6.28 |
   2SG go-take-FV 5.branch 5.ASS 6-avocado 17-there
   ‘You, go fetch the avocado tree branch there’

2  *ti-sonk-h pa-motu ..... ili le apa*
   1PL-burn-SBNJ 16-fire..... 6PDEM 6ASSOC LOC.16
   ‘We will burn it here.’

3  *utêka na-wu u-nga-busy-iya motu*
   | 6.29 |
   14.grass PDEM 2SG-can-light-CAUSE 6.fire
   ‘you can put this grass to light the fire.’
When he said, “kato jani la mapeyala” [go and fetch the avocado tree branches], he extended his right arm horizontally, in the prone position, toward a pile of tree branches (Illustration 6.30). The speaker wanted his younger brother to do something with the pointed object, the avocado tree branches. In this case, *index finger prone* also provided illocutionary force telling someone to do something about the target. The imperative function of his gesture corresponded with the informal use of *iwayne* (second person singular); this pronoun suggested that the speaker was in a higher social position than the addressee. After this directive, the young man pointed upward at the roof the *mpala* (Illustration 6.31) and told his younger brother to use the grass on the roof to keep the fire going.
Other people present at the mp\^ala chuckled at this order, since the roofing is an indispensable part of the mp\^ala, especially during the contemporaneous rainy season. This example shows that the term “index palm down” may not be entirely accurate: if the referent is physically above the gesturer, the angle of the pointing arm will be adjusted so that it points upward. In the two pointing instances above, the young man alternated his pointing arm from right to left, suggesting that he used them equally for the same communicative function. In the first gesture, he used his left hand for its proximity to the referent, the family thickets; in the second gesture, he switched the pointing arm perhaps to contrast the two referents.

In addition to its imperative function, the index finger point is also used to single out an object to highlight it in the discourse. In the chieftainship explanation from section 6.2.2, the male speaker used his index finger in the prone position to reference his mother in a B-point (Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2  Left index prone highlighting a target in discourse
Since he referred to his aunt in the third person as a character in his narrative, his index finger prone was socially acceptable. This example shows that aTonga do not prohibit people from pointing at an elder with their left hand, even when it takes the form of the imperative index finger. This allowance might indicate a general flexibility on handedness for pointing, but it might also be due to the narrative genre of the conversation, the speaker’s own advanced age, and his use of the left hand. If not for these contextual factors, his pointing gesture may threaten the face of his aunt.

![Figure 6.3](image.png)

**Figure 6.3** Right index finger for phantom reference

People may use different pointing sizes to express concerns about the addressee’s comprehension, and use an S-points to indicate targets that can only be interpreted in context (Enfield, Kita, and de Ruiter 2007). The female speaker from the chieftainship explanation described in section 6.2.2 used an S-point to identify a referent in space that could only be understood within the discourse.
context; it was a “phantom” (Bühler 1982; McNeill, Cassell, and Levy 1993) used to represent a fictional character in her narration. The S-point has an additional use: it fulfills a social-affiliational imperative of giving people the “benefit of the doubt,” assuming that people have the ability to identify referents themselves. The next example described a choreographed choir performance at a Church of Central African Presbyterian (CCAP) church, where dancing is a major part of worship (Gilman 2001:12).

Illustration 6.32  *Ciuta* (God)

During this performance, a group of youth singers danced and lifted their right hand index fingers, pointing up and placing their left hands on their chests (Illustration 6.32). This is the conventionalized pointing handshape for *Ciuta* (God) because God is believed to dwell in the sky, *pacanya* (on top). This gesture is always produced by the right hand, possibly holding Christian religious
significance, as discussed in section 1.2.1. The gesture is an S-point for both information and social-affiliational imperatives: people want to show where God is located and how He is watching over people, but also trusted that their audience, themselves, knows where God is.

CiTonga back pointing gestures must, by necessity, be small in formation because arm movements are anatomically located in the frontal plane. People point behind with their index finger with the forearm of the pointing hand remaining in the prone position as the arm wraps around the frontal plane; only the finger is directed at the referent while the rest of the body—including the face, the front torso, and eye gaze—remain fixed on the audience. I saw a young man carry out a conversation in Capongolela with his father and his father’s friend. The young man made a reference to the journey of a local man named Sylvester who went to a landmark called Lwana La Tonga (the Tonga victory), the location where aTonga defeated the Ngoni invasion in the 19th century.

*pa-ulendo űa-ku Sylvester, ndi-kubuk- a, pa-Lwana la Tonga*  
16-journey 2-ASS Sylvester, 1SG-remember-FV, 16-Iwana la Tonga  
‘...on the journey of Sylvester, I remember, on Lwana La Tonga...’
As he recalled this event, he gestured with his right index finger prone, the arm wrapping around his front torso and pointing at the location of Lwana La Tonga, about five kilometers north of Capongolela village (Illustration 6.33).

With the S-point, the man preserved the social-affiliation imperative of not over telling his elder addressee the location of Lwana La Tonga, since they had lived in Capongolela before the speaker was born and probably knew this already.

In the witchcraft interaction detailed in section 6.2.3, the young man telling the story also wrapped his right arm around to point behind with his index
finger when he pointed at the referent Nkʰata Bay (Figure 6.4). All fingers hung loosely except for the index finger that raised slightly above the other others. In order to avoid over-telling and therefore threatening his father’s face (Schegloff 2007), the son chose S-point over the B-point even though his audience appeared in need of further clarification. In ciTonga, these gestures are small in size because of the anatomical constraint for pointing behind with the index finger and because they serve a supplementary function in the discourse. The use of the right hand in both examples suggests that it is the preferred hand when one wishes to show deference toward the addressee, even though doing so requires more physical effort. This gesture configuration is reminiscent of the “hyper-contra-lateral” polite gesture in Ghana, in which people point left with their right hand wrapped around the front (Kita and Essegbey 2001).

People also use *index finger prone* to point at the ground to refer to *kunu* or *penipo* (here) and *sonu* (now) emphatically. For example, a woman in Kavuzi explained to her fellow attendees at a memorial service that a man took her daughter away to a boarding school against her will:

```
Penipo mwana ãwangu yuwa ãwa-ngu-sugza-so ca
| 6.34 | finished gesture |
15.here 1child 1-POSS PDEM 1-DPST-trouble-CAUS NEG
‘right here, my child did not cause any problem.’
```
As she said *penipo* (right here), the woman produced S-points with both of her index fingers pointing at the ground (Illustration 6.34), identifying “here” in Kavuzi as the place from which her daughter was taken. In this example, the two-handed configuration allowed the speaker to add emphasis to her discourse.

Finally, people use the *index finger prone* to “make a point” during a discourse. They use this gesture to place emphasis on a particular topic in discourse or draw attention to a situation during the conversation. For example, during the chieftainship explanation described in section 6.2.2, both speakers produced *precision points* (Morris 1977) simultaneously in the interaction space to show that they were yielding the floor to another speaker. The woman gave the floor to her male cousin so that he could give his point of view on the Tonga chieftainship system.
Both speakers produced small gestures with loosely grasped hands (Figure 6.5). In this example, index finger prone drew attention to a situation in the conversation instead of a target discussed in discourse.

**Index Finger Neutral**

The articulating palm of the index finger neutral is positioned vertically with the thumb side facing up. In Neapolitan gestures, people use the neutral form to show that the pointed object has some relevance in the utterance discourse, but may not be the primary focus (Kendon and Versante 2003). The target object is singled out because it has a relationship with the subject of the discourse, or because the gesturer wishes to say something about it and perhaps to show that it caused the condition of something else (Kendon 2004:207). In ciTonga, people also use this gesture to single out objects and say something about them, doing so using one or both hands.
For example, during a funeral eulogy in Capongolela village, an older man produced this gesture to single out people who he alleged doubted that all people eventually die (Illustration 6.35). The man stood in the middle of the funeral room with female relatives encircling him (elder males typically take charge of pacifying social problems) (Manda 1987; Van Velsen 1964).

1  sonu kumbi kuti mwa-want’u mu-tondek-engi ku-lizg-ana
   now how  that  PREP-people  2PL-fail-DFUT  15-condole-RECP
   ‘now we shall fail to condole each other’

2  mu-kay-ika?
   |  6.35  |
   2PL-doubt-CAUS
   ‘you are doubting?’

3  Ndi-yani têa-kayik-engi?
   |  6.35  |
   CONJ-who  3SG-doubt-dFUT
   ‘who can doubt this?’
As the man said “mukayika” [you are doubting?] and “ndiyani 炜akayikengi” [who will doubt this?], he raised both of his index fingers and positioned them in the neutral orientation. He did not identify a target inhabited by a real referent but instead a phantom referent or deixis am phantasma (Bühler 1982). He requested to identify doubters in the audience with both hands, including everyone in the audience as a potential suspect.

6.3.2 Open Palm Point

In the open palm pointing gestures, all fingers are extended straight or partially straight out and the thumb is typically held out apart from the fingers. In ciTonga, people produce this gesture with the fingers loosely relaxed but Yoruba speakers in Nigeria (Orie 2009) and English speakers in America sometimes flex the fingers tightly. There are four possible forms relative to the orientation of the palm: neutral, prone, away, and supine.

Open Palm Neutral

ATonga point with open palm neutral when giving directions and describing paths (nt'owa) to specified destinations. When the palm represents a
path, people use its two sides to locate the target in relation to something else. For example, when the speaker described a tarmac road in Nk'ata Bay, she lifted her left palm in neutral orientation and used it to describe the road (Figure 6.6 top left).

![Figure 6.6](image)

**Figure 6.6** Open palm neutral and related movements

She indicated a new referent, Cifila, by rotating her left forearm to supine position (Figure 6.6 top right). The first gesture showed a simple road but the second gesture, with its added movements, identified the location of Cifila relative to the road. The speaker from the narrative in section 6.2.4 also used open palm neutral to depict a *nt'owa*. She raised her left open palm up to show “*nt'owa pa Cipululu*” [the road in Cipululu] (Figure 6.6 bottom left). When she described
the bus’ climbing movement on the road, she bent her fingers backward 
and motioned them up, rotating the left elbow and wrist in order to depict the 
steepness of the mountain slope (Figure 6.6 bottom right). These examples show 
that people may produce open palm neutral with only the left hand.

**Open Palm Prone**

In ciTonga, the open palm prone is used to link together a group of ideas or 
to identify a person as the referent. An example of its first function comes from 
section 6.2.2, when the female speaker produced a open palm prone to “sum up” 
what she had just said (Figure 6.7 left), to “contain” all concepts in the discourse. 
The woman also extended her right arm to touch her mother, using it to refer to 
the character represented by the mother (Figure 6.7 right).

![Figure 6.7 Right-handed open palm prone](image)

Additionally, the open palm prone pointing gesture may also be used to tell 
time. Also known as “celestial pointing” (Floyd, forthcoming), these pointing
gestures appear language-like and have morphosyntactic properties that allow them to be reproduced in conventionalized forms and structures. In ciTonga, telling time by referencing the position of the sun in the sky is called, *kugomeza lumwi*. The ability to accurately point towards the absolute position of the sun shows that, at least for time reference, ciTonga uses an absolute spatial frame of reference.

In ciTonga, time of the day is defined with three temporal components. The first component specifies the event in the *mulenji* (morning), *mazulu* (midday and afternoon), or *usiku* (night). The second component is the clock time, often given in English, for example, *eight koloku* (eight o’clock). This is a lexical borrowing and is not used by all ciTonga speakers. The third component specifies the position of the sun relative to when the event occurred (Figure 6.8). When pointing to indicate time, all the fingers are extended and aligned,
including the thumb. A bent elbow forms an S-point and an extended elbow forms a B-point. For example, a woman from the Kasambala hamlet in Kavuzi used celestial pointing to tell her friends that her guest arrived punctually at ten o’clock in the morning (Illustration 6.36 left). Even though she did not specify the time in her spoken words, her pointing gesture communicated a temporal precision that she wished to communicate.

Illustration 6.36  Open palm prone for celestial pointing

People extend their arms fully when they wish to emphasize the time. For instance, in the interaction from section 6.2.4, the speaker extended her right arm fully when her addressee asked her to clarify whether the bus reached Ciweta in the morning or afternoon (Illustration 6.36 right). In both examples, people produced the pointing gestures with fingers that are spread apart. Pointing gestures with all fingers adducted is uncommon in ciTonga. In sum, the pointing
gesture used to indicate the time of day when an event takes place and
is always produced with an open palm prone.

The last open palm prone gesture also has a temporal function: it is used
when a speaker wishes to produce a spatial metaphor for time. Metaphoric
illustrations of abstract concepts have been observed in temporal representations
(Núñez and Sweetser 2006). In ciTonga, the word for future is kunvazi (in front)
and the word for the past is kuvuli (behind). Time is interpreted as an entity
moving with respect to a static person experiencing events, nyengu yafika (time
has arrived) and having a distance, nyengu yitali (a long time ago). “Now” shares
the same gesture as kunu (here), which is produced by pointing downward with
either one or two hands in front of the chest.

During an informal conversation about historical dialects of ciTonga in
2010, a woman in Cifila explained that people only used certain lexical forms in
the past. She waved her left hand behind repeatedly and saying “kali kali” [a
long, long time ago] (Illustration 6.37). She also emphasized this distant past by
adding that people used the lexical forms when she “was still in the womb” of
her mom. She showed this by throwing her extended left arm and upper torso
backwards (Illustration 6.38), showing that the past is behind the temporal
location of the speaker, just at it is in English.
Unlike the *kugomeza lumwi* gestures depicted above, her gestures included movements of the arms that demonstrated how people use spatial metaphors to organized the occurrence of an event relative to the present time. These two examples show that when ciTonga gesturers use S-point, as shown in Illustration 6.37, they indicate a general sense of time in the past. However, when a B-point is used, as in shown in Illustration 6.38, a distant past is suggested.

*Open Palm Away*

When people produce *open palm away* gestures, they often use it to refer the spatial extent of an object or consider the objects together as an ensemble (Kendon 2004). People produce this gesture by positioning the palm vertically so that all fingers face up and palm faces away from the gesturer.
For instance, during the explanation from 6.2.1, the speaker used her left *palm away* to show that a group of hamlets *uku* (this, there, near to us) belonged to GVH Uwafwa (Figure 6.12). Her gesture not only identified the location of Uwafwa, it also implied that Uwafwa included multiple households.

**Open Palm Supine**

The *open palm supine* gestures share the function of “presenting and being ready for receiving” (Kendon 2004:210). This gesture presents an object as if it is to be inspected by the addressee. Among ciTonga speakers, people use this gesture when they wish to introduce someone politely. For example, a man from Kavuzi introduced me to his friends by saying “*iwu ţe ţana ţasukulu*” [she is a student] and pointing at me with his palm in the supine position. He presented the pointed target, me, to other people around him so that we could be acquainted.
According to the Tonga custom, men introduce women with the one-handed pointing gesture described above, but women introduce men with both hands in the supine position (personal communication with Winfred Mkochi on March 12, 2014). In this gesture, politeness is expressed through the handshape not handedness.

6.3.3 Pointing with Other Gesture Forms

Other gesture forms noted in my fieldwork include pointing with the index and middle finger, pointing with the thumb, pointing with the fist, and pointing with other objects. Many of these gestures have neutralizing effects, making them less face-threatening than pointing with the index finger directly.
Index-Middle Finger Combination

In ciTonga, people sometimes point with their middle and index finger together. Pointing with this two-fingered handshape suggests that the gesturer wishes to make a reference without being confrontational and direct.

Figure 6.10 Right index-middle point

For instance, during the chieftainship explanation shown in section 6.2.2, the male speaker used his left index and middle finger to gesture the death of his aunt in a narrative setting. This gesture appeared less face-threatening and more respectful compared to pointing with the index finger alone, especially when death was linked with his aunt in the explanation.

Kulongo Ndi Cikufl: Thumb Point

The thumb is used to point in instances where giving the exact location or identity of the referent is not necessary, since the audience might already have a
shared knowledge about who the referents are or where they are located (Kendon 2004). For example, during the 6.2.3 narration on witchcraft, the speaker used his right thumb to define the target, the M5 tarmac road, as *penapa* (right here [on the tarmac road]) since it was close by and almost all family compounds in Camawoya are located next to it. He used this gesture because everyone present had a shared understanding of what the referent was.

![Figure 6.11 Right-handed thumb point](image)

In English, the thumb pointing gesture is not commonly used to indicate a person because it downgrades respect. The thumb is mainly used to point at an object to the side of or behind the speaker because pointing in other directions will produce an “awkward” configuration (Kendon 2004). However, anatomical constraint may not be the only reason why people use the thumb to refer to targets on the side. After all, aTonga prefer to point behind with their index finger, even though doing so requires them to wrap their pointing arm around the front torso.
**Kulongo Ndi Nk'onya: Fist Point**

CiTonga speakers point with their fist (nk'onya) when they reference the dead, as described in the local idiom “kulongo ndi nk'onya ku masanu” [point at the cemetery with the fist].

![Illustration 6.40  Kulongo ku masanu (to point at the grave)](image)

People are required to use the fist to show respect, but this gesture has no handedness. This gesture is produced in the prone position (Illustration 6.40). People believe that using the fist instead of the index finger may conceal the identity of the person performing the pointing gesture—a necessary move lest the spirits of the dead find and haunt them in their dreams. For example in Ghana, a local idiom states that one does not “use the left hand to point the way to your father’s village”, suggesting that pointing with the left hand would be disrespectful and doing so would show a lack of appreciation for one’s possessions (Dzobo 1992).
Pointing with Objects

CiTonga speakers also point with an object occasionally. For example, during the witchcraft storytelling detailed in section 6.3.4, the speaker pointed at Nk\textsuperscript{h}ata Bay with a piece of sugarcane held by his left hand (Figure 6.12).

Figure 6.12  Pointing with a sugar cane

People also point with writing instruments, such as a pen or a piece of chalk. However, many CiTonga informants suggested that it is impolite to point with long objects, such as tree branches, because it may disturb people nearby. In polite circumstances, people allow this pointing gesture when the target is located far away or is not a person. This is because when people point at a person with an object, it may appear to that person to be a physical threat.

6.4  Directives

Directives are expressions that request someone or something to go away or come toward the location of the speaker. CiTonga speakers often accompany
directive requests with pointing gestures. *Come here* gestures are characterized by the hand or arm moving from a direction away from the gesturer to a position closer to the gesturer, as shown above. *Go away* gestures are characterized by motions moving from a position closer to the gesturer to a position farther away from the gesturer. To produce a *go away* gesture, people lift the pointing hand to eye level or in front of the chest and produce a quick wrist motion to move the hand outward, fingers relaxed. For example, a woman in Kavuzi waved her left arm to make chickens leave a pile of maize drying in the sun (Illustration 6.41). When waving animals away, people may say *tiye* (let’s leave), or, in the case of trying to move chickens away, *p‘ya*, because the sound mimics the sound of chicken feathers flapping.

![Illustration 6.41  Tiya or p‘ya (go away)]
A woman from Kasambala village produced a two-handed go away, c'oka (go away or get out), by bending her arms so that her hands were perpendicular to the shoulders, while quickly thrusting the arms up (Illustration 6.42). People produce this gesture in exasperation to get children or other small unwanted guests, including chicken or goats, out of the house or yard. People produce go away gestures with either the right or left hand, or with both hands.

![Illustration 6.42 Coka (get out) and Illustration 6.43 Aluta (they left)](image)

In another example, a woman from Mphande told her daughter a story about their acquaintances leaving the bus depot in Mzuzu. While saying, “aluta” [they left], she made a flicking motion with her left hand raised in midair (Illustration 6.44). As shown above, words such as tiye, p'ya, c'oka, luta, and pita could all accompany the go away gesture. The go away gesture is common in other societies: In Israel, people “flick” the hand toward the target to make them leave.
(Safadi and Valentine 1988). In German, the “away” gestures may be related as a gesture family that shows negation (Müller 2014). The *go away gesture* is also produced similarly in North American English, generally at the chin, chest, or waist level. When it is produced at eye level in English, the gesture has the quotable meaning of the dismissive “whatever” (personal communication with Nathalie Dajko, March 6, 2015).

In ciTonga, the “come here” directive is represented by the polite verbal form *zani kunu*, or the familiar form *za kunu*. To produce a *come here gesture*, people place the articulating hand in front of their upper torso, in a palm prone position. All fingers except for the thumb bend at the joints to form a hook-like shape (Illustration 6.44).

![Illustration 6.44  Zani kunu (come here)](image

In this example, a different woman from Kasambala told her young daughter to come closer to the rest of the family so she does not wander off by
herself. *Come here gestures* are produced in different sizes depending on
whether the addressee is paying attention to the gesturer. An S-point is sufficient
if the addressee is looking in the direction of the gesturer. When the addressee is
at a distance characterized by *uyo* (that one in the middle distance), people
produce a B-point with a large inward sweeping motion. In ciTonga, people
typically use a single hand to beckon someone to come here. The *come here gesture*
has been attested across Bantu societies (Mazibuko et al. 2007; Ribbens 2007).

6.5 Summary

In this chapter, I presented 42 examples of ciTonga pointing gestures
observed in Kavuzi and Cifila during my fieldwork. These gestures may be
roughly categorized by whether they are produced with extended index finger,
open palm, or other handshapes.

<table>
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<th>Right</th>
<th>Left</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>53%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</table>
Table 6.2 shows that in my data, point gestures produced with the open palm are the most common in ciTonga, with over 58 percent of the observed gestures produced in this manner. Pointing with the index finger is the second most common form, encompassing over 27 percent of the recorded gestures. I only documented five examples in which a speaker used other handshapes. The handedness distribution of these three categories suggests that there is no statistical difference between pointing with the right or left hand in ciTonga (39 percent for right hand point, 53 percent for left hand point, and 8 percent for pointing with both hands). ATonga discriminate against the left hand in everyday ritual activities and discourage its use in single-handed activities such as writing. However, there is no strong prohibition against the use of the left hand in pointing.

CiTonga speakers produce *index finger prone* to identify a target and request that their addressee do something about it. They use either the right or left hand to point and sometimes switch hands to contrast two different targets. When they produce a gesture as an S-point, they suggest that the target needs clarification from spoken discourse, as in the case of phantom pointing. People use *index finger prone* to point at a referent behind, typically to indicate a place that's in that direction, or to indicate a person standing behind the speaker doing so by wrapping their pointing arm around the front of the torso. The only
pointing gesture produced with both hands is the *penipo* gesture that is always small in size. *Index finger prone* also forms a precision point to draw attention to a situation within the discourse, such switching “floors”.

Handshape plays several pragmatic roles in face-to-face interactions. Pointing at people with the index finger is confrontational and usually makes an imperative request. Using forearm neutral or non-index finger forms serves a neutralizing function and lessens the face-threatening effect. This function is clearly practiced in *kulongo ndi nk°onya* because the local custom claims that pointing without fingers may conceal the identity of gesturers and prevent spirits from haunting them. Fist pointing is distinctive in pointing typology, as it has not yet been noted in other societies. People also use open palm gestures to neutralize potentially face-threatening acts, such as the *open palm supine*, common in introductions. Other functions of the open palm include using it to represent a path and manipulating it to show objects moving on the path, referencing the spatial extent of the target, and telling time. ATonga use *open palm prone* for celestial pointing, in which they accurately indicate the position of the sun when a referred event occurred. This system of celestial pointing is still uncommon in the literature of pointing, and could be of interest in future studies.

Among aTonga in Malawi, the left and right hands are not directly associated with politeness in pointing-type references and, instead, people use
different handshapes to show deference. This may be the same reason
that introducing someone with the left hand is accepted and even used in polite
contexts, with politeness as long as the open palm supine is used. The lack of
hand preference suggests that the cultural taboo against using the left hand has
no impact on pointing gestures. The only exception is the reference to Ciuta
(God), which is always produced by the right hand. Referring to Ciuta moves a
situation into the religious domain and makes the gesture a ritual act. Only ritual
gestures are affected by the association of right as good and left as bad.
7 Discussion and Conclusion

In this dissertation, I set out determine whether or not ciTonga speakers do not observe a popularly claimed “left hand taboo” in all interactive domains. To do that, I recorded over 50 hours of spontaneous multimodal interactions in Nk³ata Bay and compared the use of handedness in two interactive domains. I observed that while left-handed activities are less common in the domain of everyday rituals, they are equally as common as right-handed activities in the domain of talks. In this chapter, I bring the findings together and show that an overarching prescriptive norm does not uniformly permeate ciTonga multimodal interactions. The anecdotal dichotomy between right as good and left as bad does not correspond to actual gesture use in ciTonga. After giving a summary of the chapters and contrast handedness in the two domains, I show that a kinesic expression becomes significant only when we consider its function in terms of its contribution to the overall multimodal message. Possible future projects from this dissertation include building a corpus of ciTonga multimodal interactions and gesture repertoire, investigating the use and structure of other ciTonga multimodal expressions such as non-manual gestures and sound symbolisms, and exploring the connection between ciTonga gestures and the homesign of the
Yavimba hamlet which will provide the first account of a natural sign language in Malawi.

### 7.1 Taboo Observance in Everyday Rituals and Talks

The structure and function of everyday rituals and ordinary talks are not the same. Community-specific conventions affect how an everyday ritual is carried out (Ameka 2009; Enfield 2009; Haviland 2009), but pragmatic principles of conversation govern the structure of talk-in-interactions (Dingemanse, Blythe, and Dirksmeyer 2014; Levinson 2011; Stivers et al. 2009). Tonga sociocultural ideologies are expressed and maintained through everyday rituals, but what ordinary talks actually “do” are less clear. Table 7.1 summarizes the functions of handedness in different everyday rituals.

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<th>Table 7.1 Gesture handedness and deference in everyday rituals</th>
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<td>Either</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>EATING</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.1.1 Handedness in Everyday Rituals

In many Tonga everyday rituals, a deferential stance is expressed through the canonically respectful gesture, casa, right hand supported by left. A variant two-handed symmetrical gesture has the same function in giving and receiving, when the transferring object is too large to be handled by one hand. There are many ciTonga cultural scripts that constrain the form and structure of everyday ritual events, such as “kupasana timoneni muko manja” [to greet one must shake hands], “kujikama, ulyengi kant’u nei ᕨala kusoka uwengi ᕨaka” [kneeling you eat with elders, keep standing and you eat nothing] (Mphande 2014), and “wacita zakumazele” [you have done left things]. Malawians have a strong distaste for those that use their left hand dominantly in greeting, giving/receiving, and eating (Zverev 2006).

Greeting is mandatory in all types of social encounters once people establish a shared perceptual field. Greeting with casa handshape shows deference toward the addressee and respect for traditional Tonga power structures like seniority and patriarchy. During a polite encounter, people also exchange wellbeing inquiries that exhibit humanistic considerations for fellow human beings. During chance encounters between people who are close affiliates, exchanging a brief gesture may suffice to show affection for one another, but greeting is obligatory for all people and situations. Leave-taking
includes many multimodal components and is in many ways more elaborate than greeting and does not include gesture as a primary feature.

Giving and receiving are reciprocal pairs, one person gives and the other receives. The gesture for showing deference in giving and receiving are very similar to *casa* because in many regards, greeting is also a form of giving—giving oneself to others. Social distance in giving and receiving is displayed through different handshapes. Like greeting, close affiliates can give and exchange one-handed, as in the Camawoya example of sharing a joke. Deviating from the *casa* norm allows people to create different social identities (Silverstein 1976). Additionally, a person who gives or receives one-handed understand that he or she has superiority over the addressee who responds with two-handed gestures. This asymmetry indexes differences in power; those who are superior, like men, can produce one- or two-handed gesture, but those who are inferior, like women, can only respond two-handed. When a person with inferior power gives to one with superior power, as in the example of a young man giving cassava to an elder, the rule of seniority can still be observed even when the inferior gave with only his left hand because a physical obstacle constrained his right hand and yet he still performed other respectful body comportments. It is possible for a belief like the left hand taboo to be part of the collective consciousness even when it is practiced with some flexibility (Goffman 1967).
Eating is a solo event performed within a group of people and requires the use of right hand and side. The left hand taboo applies most rigidly to this ritual because eating nsima is always preceded by other activities that give people time to make the right hand available. In Nk'ata Bay, it is not possible to have a “chance” eating, even when one joins a meal unexpectedly, he or she will still wash the hands and eat with the right. Snacking falls outside of the eating ritual, because a person proceeds directly to food consumption, bypassing the little rituals involved in eating nsima.

7.1.2 Handedness in Ordinary Talks

I examined handedness in two types of gestures used in the domain of ordinary talking. Quotable gestures have conventions for how they should be performed and what they mean, often bearing resemblance to real-life referents. Pointing gestures produce deictic references anchored on communicative context (Hanks 2006). Handedness generally does not index social information during ordinary talks. Instead, semantic meaning and pragmatic functions are expressed through particular gestures forms and sizes, such as using the fist when pointing at the cemetery to fulfill the social imperative of not offending the dead, and using open palm prone, fingers adducted, to reference the temporal information. The structure of two-handed asymmetrical gestures generally follows a
dominance constraint: one hand is the dominant articulator of the
gesture and the other is structurally subordinate. Using either hand dominantly
has no impact on the semantic interpretation of the gesture, so long as it is used
consistently (Vicars 2004). In ciTonga, when gesturing hands are vertical
reflections of one another, the dominance constraint does not apply, nor does the
rule of handedness consistency. This phenomenon applies to gestures of either
domain. Handedness is in free variation in orientation asymmetry gestures.

Four factors affect handedness in ciTonga one-handed gestures: the
gesturer’s handedness predisposition, spatial elements (referent location and
movement limitation), discourse contrast, and the referent’s own lateral
properties. The first factor is physiological. In skilled activities handedness may
come from a person’s innate lateral preference and social upbringing, but in
gestures—which are not skilled—these environment influences are insignificant
and irrelevant. The second factor pertains to properties of the objective space.
When physical entities obstruct the movements of one side of the gesturer, he or
she will evidently use the other side regardless of whether it is left or right.
However, people ignore this “natural” choice and circumvent the obstruction
when they need to be polite—their marked actions index the friendly/deferential
requirements of Tonga society. People switch hands when they wish to
distinguish a referent from the preceding referent with both hands playing equal
roles in the discourse. The referred object’s own lateral properties affect handedness most rigidly. People use the right hand to gesture *kulya* because they eat with their right (and are required to do so by sociocultural norm) while they use the right hand to gesture *Ciuta* because Christian theology associates positivity and God with the right side.

In ciTonga, two-handed symmetrical gestures have both semantic and pragmatic functions. Semantically, they are deictics that address the audience present and metaphors that reference *muzi* (hamlet), the basic unit of society. Pragmatically, they evaluate other people’s behavior or proposal. They reject and refuse and show that the speaker has no possessions and would like the addressee’s empathy. The sheer performance of these gestures index the speaker-addressee relationship; not their handedness. The Tonga cultural script constrains people of subordinate social status from unnecessary gestures and making overt requests.

### 7.1.3 Handedness Indexes Social Distance in ciTonga

The left hand taboo is a prescriptive ideology and is supposed to affect every competent member of the ciTonga speech community, however, its application is inconsistent and boundaries of use are abstract. As a result, the assumed norm is observed in some domains but not all. This phenomenon can be
explained by theoretical understandings about practice of actions in
different social congregates and the different functional properties of kinesic
signs in each domain.

Tonga informants with different levels of cultural awareness all agree that
the right hand is “better” than the left hand. However, an ideology claimed by
many native speakers does not necessarily describe how people interact in
realistic local settings, nor does this explain the extent to which it should be
applied and what it does exactly to the people receiving and observing the action
(Irvine 2006). What the taboo does do is provide a common belief stereotype with
which people can affiliate (Agha 1998; Irvine and Gal 2000; Silverstein 2003) and
define a social group as one that shares this stereotype that distinguishes itself
from other groups that do not (Gumperz 1964). In other words, having
knowledge about left hand discrimination and its practice are among the belief
that “makes” a person the aTonga of lakeside Malawi. However, this assumes
that a behavioral norm can be applied homogenously to everyone who speaks
ciTonga in the same geographic locality. The assumption does not accurately
capture everyone’s dynamic social personae emerged through mutually engaged
practices, nor does it encompass the possible stances people may take as they
interact with others who have different social experiences (Eckert and
In ciTonga, the function of the left hand varies depending on its domain of use. Because of this property, the relative saliency of their meanings depends on different interpretations (Gumperz 1992; Silverstein 1981). Gestural and kinesic expressions have different roles in everyday ritual and ordinary talk. In everyday rituals, gestures, like *casa* and *pepa*, carry the main “message content” (Levinson 2002:28) of the multimodal utterance. In many situations, their propositional content may surpass and sometimes replace the verbal wellbeing inquiry of adjacency pairs (see section 4.1.1). In contrast, gestures in ordinary talks often provide non-propositional extralinguistic information that complements the lexico-syntactic utterances delivered through speech (Levinson 2002:28). Gestures carry “foreground” information in everyday rituals but “background” information in talks (Table 7.2, adapted from Levinson 2002:28).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7.2 Different functions of gestures in two domains</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Everyday Ritual</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gestures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The function of gestures in everyday rituals are also more salient to native ciTonga speakers because their forms have “unavoidable referentiality” (Silverstein 1981), containing referential oppositions that invoke difference in
social distances. Like pronominal V- and T-forms, giving and receiving
with the *right supported by left or right or left hand alone* index opposing referential
values: the former shows deference toward the addressees while the latter shows
familiarity or disregard for them. The function of gestures in ordinary talk are
inconspicuous and less salient because they do not have the referential property
described above and are not continuously segmentable as overt meaningful units
(Silverstein 1981). Native ciTonga speakers and local idioms (Mphande 2014)
easily spell out the kinesic norms for everyday rituals, but have more difficulty
describing the meaning and function of body movements in ordinary talks. This
theoretical explanation also works for understanding why *Ciuta* must be
right-handed: the deictic sign, *right index finger pointing up in S-point,* “is linked to
and requires, for its effect, some independently verifiable contextual factor”
(Silverstein 1981:24), the production of the *Ciuta* gesture presupposes that “up
there” is where God is, though this information is not verifiable in real life, the
metaphor’s presence is ubiquitous in ciTonga and Christian theologies.

7.2 A Ranking of Contextual Constraints

Handedness in ciTonga kinesic signs can be understood in terms of a
ranking of different constraints present in the interaction event. Four types of
constraint regulate the use of handedness in a spontaneous face-to-face
interaction: lexical meaning of the sign, spatial allowance local to the event, interlocutors’ social distance within an event, and their pre-established social distance. Each constraint has minor and major features characterizing their key attributes that affect hand preference. Gesture form is determined by prioritizing the narrower over the wider constraints (Table 7.3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEANING</th>
<th>EVENT-SPECIFIC SOCIAL DISTANCE</th>
<th>PRE-ESTABLISHED SOCIAL DISTANCE</th>
<th>SPATIAL LIMITATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>maximal</td>
<td>right</td>
<td>no contact/right/both</td>
<td>right/both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>minimal</td>
<td>either</td>
<td>→ either</td>
<td>→ either</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the lexical constraint, “right” plays a major role in the meaning and use of certain quotable conventionalized gestures. For example, “right” carries a major iconic component of the kulya gesture because its referent is a ritual in which everyone uses the right hand. “Right” has minimal semantic contribution to the kamanavi gesture used to describe quantity so handedness is flexible. In Nkata Bay, referents with “right” as a major semantic component also tend to reflect normative sociocultural values and morals. The constraint of event-specific social distance describes the stance and footing between interlocutors during an event. For this constraint, a minimal social distance
between interlocutors gives them the flexibility to use which ever hand
is convenient for the conversation, including switching hands to contrast
different referents. Another constraint of distance is established by larger and
more general social classifications such as people’s age and job ranking. Like the
previous constraint, handedness is more flexible when there is a small power
distance between interlocutors. The final constraint refers to the local physical
surrounding of the interaction. A local surround that imposes minimal or no
movement restriction allows people to be flexible with their hand preference,
and of course, an obstruction to one side of the body will make people gesture
with the other side. For the non-lexical constraints, handedness is a stylistic
choice because people can use many variations to accomplish the communication
act (Jakobson 1960), but choosing a respectful two-handed configuration can
index event-specific and larger ideological social distances between interlocutors.
For the same reason, handedness is not stylistic within the lexical constraint
because using the left hand removes the main semantic component of the sign, so
variation is not possible.

7.3 Broader Implications

In the study of face-to-face interactions, the function of verbal speech forms
as social indexes has been well documented. However, related studies on
multimodal utterances, including gestures, are still scant. Findings from this study show that an understanding on taboo observance in multimodal interactions sheds light on the relationship among event properties, utterance styles, and larger sociocultural ideologies. My data also provided the first documentation on the gesture system of a Malawian Bantu language.

The taboo that I examined in this study is well known anecdotally in folk definitions but not strictly practiced in all interactions. In Nkha Bay, there are of course certain taboos that are strictly enforced, such as in-law-avoidance or publically displaying affection to a member of the opposite sex. Both types of taboos allow people to coordinate joint social actions and thereby creating and defining the community to which they belong (Gumperz 1958). What I have shown with the left hand taboo is that the application of a commonly-known ideology depends on people’s pragmatic competence. When people produce a gesture configuration that obeys the taboo, they not only display their knowledge on Tonga sociocultural norm but also transform an interaction into a space for negotiating their social distance. When observed within a spontaneous interaction, the observance of a gesture-based taboo works as a controlled factor for gauging the types of responses people may have when they interact with interlocutors belonging to different social identities, and as interaction alignments shift. Observing a taboo by alternating one’s gesture form can
transform an interaction from an ordinary conversation to a socially
significant performance that follows specific scripts and endorses normative
beliefs and values. My study and existing accounts on left hand taboo in gesture
provides a theoretical field for comparing cross-cultural and cross-linguistic
tendencies in the social control of bodily communication.

With this dissertation, I offered a gesture account of the “intangible
cultural heritage” of ciTonga speakers in lakeshore Malawi (Mazibuko et al.
2007). While there is a strong literature foundation on Tonga history (Van Velsen
2004), beliefs and customs (MacAlpine 1906a, 1906b; Mphande 2000, 2006, 2014),
art forms (Gilman 2000; Kamlongera 1986; Mpata 2000), ethnographic-based
analyses on natural communications and interactions are still scant (Hebert and
Wu 2013; Orie and Wu 2013; Sanders 2013, 2014; Wu 2012). Existing studies show
that the Tonga linguistic and ethnic community provides a unique geo-political
context for the study of its everyday practices. These works not only challenge
the assumed homogeneity of Malawi, but also provide an important area for
carrying out cross-linguistic typologies.
7.4  Future Considerations

As I investigated the relationship between cultural norm and their domains of use, I noted several research directions for future studies on multimodality in spontaneous interactions. I will describe three immediate studies that can be carried out based on available data.

7.4.1  Corpus of Multimodal Interactions and Repertoires of Gestures

Most of my recordings contain conversations with noticeable beginning and end boundaries and contain “maximally informal speech events” with minimal pre-existing structural constraints (Enfield et al. 2007). They also contain diverse conversations situations with dyadic, triadic, or four or more person interactions, each of which have different effects on speaker-addressee speech and gesture (Özyürek 2000). A feasible next step that can follow this dissertation is the creation of a corpus of ciTonga multimodal interactions. Audio and video recordings of North American English spontaneous conversations show that conversations follow rule-guided parameters and are practice-oriented (Enfield et al. 2007), including for example, turn-taking organizations (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974), the use of repairs (Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1977), and the use of specific structures to facilitate a particular response (Sacks 1973). Dingemanse, Torreira, and Enfield (2013) show that the interjection huh? may
have universal use as a repair initiation. Typological studies on spoken
African languages have contributed to the current understanding of all levels of
linguistic structure, including for example, tone (Goldsmith 1976), noun
classification, and the agreement system (Greenberg 1963). Analysis of my
recordings will provide further cross-cultural and linguistic evidence for whether
or not existing observations on conversation structures apply universally.

With the quotable gesture descriptions from the dissertation, I would like
to produce a repertoire of ciTonga gestures, similar to the repertoire of urban
South African gestures described in Brookes (2004). In this repertoire,
conventionalized gestures will be described and verified by native speakers to
determine their functions in conversations. The repertoire will also prove
documentations for cross-linguistic comparison in other African languages. My
preliminary observation on ciTonga quotable gestures show that there are a
number of common gestures across the sub-Saharan region, such as the gesture
for *kulya* (to eat), observed in Yoruba; the *casa* handshake, observed in Western
Kenyan (Creider 1977); and *muntbulumi* (men) observed in Yoruba (Orie 2012),
and urban South African communities (Brookes 2006). This repertoire will
contribute to a possible future typology of Sub-Saharan African conventionalized
gestures which will improve the understanding of regional tendencies.

Floyd (forthcoming) observes that the celestial pointing system in
Nheengatú in Brazil has morphosyntactic properties that allow new gestures to be created following the same grammatical structure. CiTonga has a similar time identification system in which people make accurate references to celestial positions during spontaneous talk. A deeper analysis of this information will also contribute to the investigation of cross-linguistic structures in multimodal interactions. The structure of ciTonga pointing gestures suggests a second area of investigation: Pragmatically, Lao speakers use different gesture sizes according to the informational need of the addressee and social-affiliational requirements of not over-telling and under-assuming people’s ability to identify referred objects (Enfield, Kita, and de Ruiter 2007). My observation shows that ciTonga speakers also gesture in sizes to imply informational or social-affiliational requirements. In a possible further project, I can carry out qualitative analysis of the use of B- versus S-points to see whether this pragmatic feature applies cross-linguistically.

7.4.2 Other Multimodal Expressions

Besides manual gestures, ciTonga has large repertoire of non-manual gestures, as well as extralinguistic vocal utterances that also contribute to the overall meaning of a conversation. Across languages, non-manual gestures play a larger role in face-to-face interactions. For example, lip pointing is part of the
pointing repertoire of the Cuna (Sherzer 1973), Lao (Enfield 2001), and Yoruba (Orie 2009). The role of the gaze is also crucial in monitoring discourse (Kendon 1967a, b; Goodwin 1980; Streeck 1993). My preliminary observation suggests that aTonga frequently use head pointing and eyebrow pointing in spontaneous interactions.

CiTonga speakers frequently use interjections, ideophones (Dingemanse 2013), and sound symbolisms (Nuckolls 1999) in their daily conversations. For example, the ciTonga interjection etsi hey is frequently used among female speakers, along with the horizontal hand slap (noted in section 4.2.2), when they wish to express agreement and solidarity with their interlocutors. As far as I know, there is no ethnographic account of this type of interjection in Bantu languages.

Figure 7.1 Sound symbolism and gesture

During fieldwork in 2010, I observed a woman in Cifila depicting a bow and arrow through a combination of sound symbolism and kinesic expressions.
She extended her right arm to mimic the shape of the arrow and retracted her left arm tightly to the chest, saying *pa*, the sound of a shooting arrow (Figure 7.1).

I briefly discussed the manipulation of seating space to index social distances in access rituals, where the hosts choose to react or not react when visitors arrive in the family compound. When hosts take actions, they make available the best chair in the house and place it far from where family members of the host are sitting; when hosts do not take overt actions, they expect the visitor to find a seat for him or herself and position it close to other people.

CiTonga speakers appear to use physical distance to index solidarity but more data and analysis are necessary to verify this observation.

CiTonga speakers also have a large repertoire of ideophones, grammatically marked words that provide vivid sensory experiences (Dingemanse 2011) that are in active use in many African languages (Blench 2009; Childs 1994; Doke 1935). There is an account of ideophones in ciTumbuka (Mphande 1989), a language relative of ciTonga, showing that these words also depict sensory experiences particular to everyday life in Malawi. A documentation of ciTonga ideophones and their co-occurring gestures will provide further understanding of how people use multimodality to describe their perception of the physical and sociocultural environment.
7.4.3 Homesigns and Malawian Sign Language

Deaf people in the Northern Region did not attend institutionalized schooling until 1994, when the Synod of Livingstonia opened the Embangweni School for Deaf Children in Mzimba District (Embangweni School for Deaf Children 2012). Based on my understanding, today, teachers at the school currently instruct using a combination of American Sign Language and local signs, after initial attempts with the oral method (Embangweni School for the Deaf 2012). There has not been any study of the grammar of Malawian Sign Language, but Victoria Nyst notes that its structure may be unique because it has undergone only limited influence from foreign sign languages (e-mail to author, June 19, 2012). During my 2012 fieldwork in Yavimba, I interacted with a 19-year-old deaf woman who attended Embangweni School for the Deaf. At the time, she had been attending the deaf school for eight years. The young woman interacted with her family and neighbors in Yavimba using home-based signs (Frishberg 1987), because no one else in her family is deaf but many people converse with her using local linguistic resources.
This woman’s two sisters frequently conversed with her in home-based signing and often translated her signs for people who could not read sign. Based on preliminary observations, the woman produced many signs that are also used in ciTonga quotable gestures, such as the gestures for muntʻulumi (men), ambuya (elder), and ndalama (money). There are some signs that were different, such as azungu (foreigner), which is produced by twirling both index fingers vertically next to the jaw line to depict long ringlets of Caucasians. This sign also allows phonological deletion in which its two-handed production is reduced to one (Battison 1977). The ukavu (poverty) sign is produced by placing the fingers of the dominant hand on the elbow of the non-dominant hand (Figure 7.2). Judith Maxwell points out that there exists similar gestures in Guatemala, where it means “stingy” (notes to the author, December 26, 2014). This observation suggests that the form might be popular across languages. As part of my study on handedness in multimodal interactions, I recorded over two hours of this
family’s home-based signs, including translations of the signs by her
hearing sisters. In a future opportunity I hope to carry out more analyses on the
structure and form of this sign language based on these recordings.
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Biography

Karen Wu Sanders is a Ph.D. candidate at Tulane University in the Department of Anthropology, under the direction of Professor Olanike Ola Orie. She received an M.A. in Anthropology from Tulane University in 2012. Prior to her graduate work, she taught secondary school science in Cifila CDSS, Nkhata Bay District as a Peace Corps Volunteer from 2006-2009. She received a B.S. in Biology from the University of California, San Diego, in 2006.

As a graduate student at Tulane University, Karen has presented parts of her thesis work at three major conferences: The 43rd and 44th Annual Conference on African Linguistics in New Orleans and Washington, DC, respectively; and the 6th Conference of the International Society for Gesture Studies. She has also taught ANTH 1030 Languages of the World as part of the teaching requirement for the Ph.D. degree. Karen currently lives in Washington D.C. with her husband, Steve.