Research group Sign Language Grammar & Typology
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We study aspects of the grammar of natural sign languages, their acquisition and diachronic change, and in how far sign languages differ from each other in various grammatical domains.

NGT GRAMMAR

- Project: Descriptive grammar of Sign Language of the Netherlands (NGT). Implementing previous research & conducting original research, e.g. on conditional clauses:

  - What are nonmanual markers of conditionals in NGT?

  - Results:
    1. Raised eyebrows seem optional (unlike in other sign languages);
    2. Head movement and/or tilt seems obligatory;
    3. When a manual marker is present, nonmanual markers are used less frequently.

BODY-ANCHORED VERBS

- How does iconicity (form-meaning relation) affect sign language structure?

  - Body-anchored verbs:
    (examples from NGT)

  - Result: only first person subject ('I') can be dropped due to iconic associations:

CLASSIFIER PREDICATES

- Classifier predicates: verbs of movement/location; the handshape classifies an argument

  - Research on ASL: systematic connection between argument structure and classifier type

  - Results: classifier predicates in Russian Sign Language & 4 other sign languages have complex event/argument structures

SIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

- How do deaf mothers and their deaf and hearing children combine spoken and signed language?

  - Results: utterances can consist of following combinations:

    o Fully signed and fully spoken
      signs: YOU WALK TO CAMP^FIRE (NGT or NL word order)
      words: you walk to campfire

    o Mainly signed, with words produced simultaneously
      signs: YOU WALK TO CAMP^FIRE (usually NGT word order)
      words: fire

    o Mainly spoken, with signs produced simultaneously
      signs: WALK CAMP^FIRE (usually NL word order)
      words: you walk to campfire

  - Mixed signs and words are produced simultaneously, but content differs, e.g.
    signs: HUGGING.........
    words: you sweet rabbit

  Both signs and words are necessary for complete message.

SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

- How do adults who acquire a sign language as a second language learn to use the signing space to express grammatical relations?

  1. Case studies (n=2, longitudinal)

  2. Elicitation study (n=14, longitudinal) into classifiers and agreement verbs

  3. Intervention study (2018) - does explicit instruction help?