Nominal pluralization in Sign Language of the Netherlands: Phonological constraints on simple and sideward reduplication

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Nominal pluralization in Sign Language of the Netherlands (NGT): Phonological constraints on simple and sideward reduplication

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Background

- **Reduplication** is a common pluralization strategy across sign languages.
- Phonological features of the base noun may **constrain** reduplication (allomorphy):
  - e.g., German SL and British SL: reduplication blocked for body-anchored nouns [1; 2].

Aim & Methodology

- **Aim**: Investigate phonological constraints on nominal **reduplication** in NGT.
- **Data**: 297 plural nouns from the **Corpus NGT** [3] + 189 **elicited** plural nouns [4]

Results (1)

- **Two main reduplication types** in NGT: simple (1a) and sideward (1b) reduplication;
- The choice of reduplication type largely depends on **phonological properties** (location & movement) of the base noun (see Table);
- **Other attested strategies**: zero marking (attested for all nouns), simultaneous reduplication (very few nouns).

Reduplication – despite being iconically motivated – is subject to language-specific grammatical constraints.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phonological feature</th>
<th>Simple reduplication</th>
<th>Sideward reduplication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Body-anchored</td>
<td>53.5%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex movement</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lateral</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>80.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midsagittal</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion & Conclusion

- **Variation** in NGT pluralization:
  - Various strategies available;
  - No categorical patterns;
  - Reduplication is optional.
- Reduplication in NGT is **less constrained** than in other sign languages: Phonological features influence reduplication type, but do not block reduplication altogether.

References: