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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

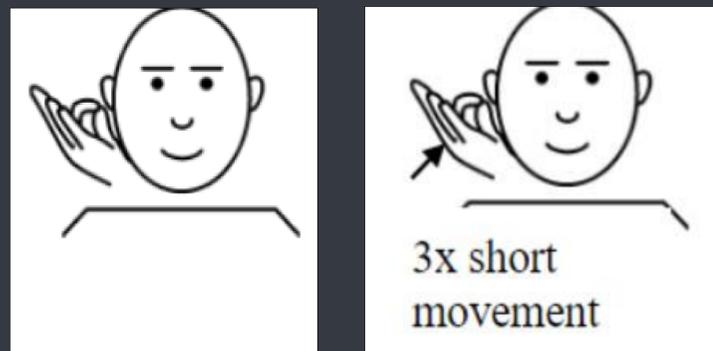
- **Reduplication** is a common pluralization strategy across sign languages.
- Phonological features of the base noun may **constrain** reduplication (allomorphy):
→ e.g., German SL and British SL: reduplication blocked for body-anchored nouns [1; 2].

Aim & Methodology

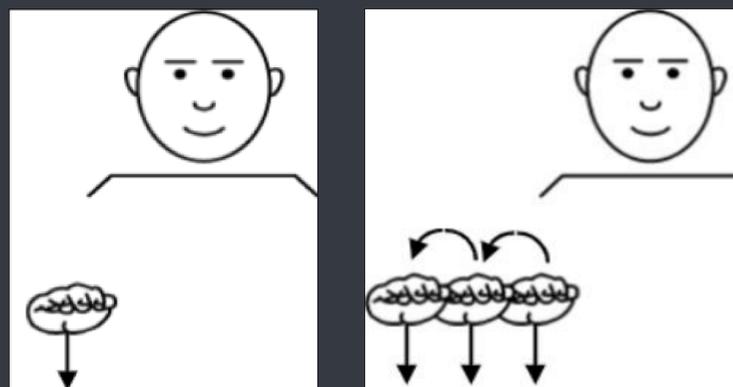
- **Aim:** Investigate **phonological constraints on nominal reduplication** in NGT.
- **Data:** 297 plural nouns from the **Corpus NGT** [3] + 189 **elicited** plural nouns [4]

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).



(1a) Simple reduplication of body-anchored noun WOMAN



(1b) Sideward reduplication of lateral noun CHILD
(Figures from [1])

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

Results (2)

Phonological feature	Simple reduplication	Sideward reduplication
Body-anchored	53.5%	2.7%
Complex movement	37.5%	5%
Lateral	1.8%	80.8%
Midsagittal	27%	21.6%

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: [1] Pfau & Steinbach. 2005. Plural formation in German SL: Constraints and strategies. In Leuninger & Happ (eds.), *Gebärdensprachen: Struktur, Erwerb, Verwendung*, 111-144. [2] Sutton-Spence & Woll. 1999. *The linguistics of British SL. An introduction*. Cambridge University Press. [3] Crasborn, Zwitserlood & Ros. 2008. *The Corpus NGT: A digital open access corpus of movies and annotations of SL of the Netherlands*. <https://cutt.ly/rhHAg8C>. [4] van Boven. 2020. Fill the gap: A novel test to elicit nominal plurals in NGT. *FEAST* 3: 56-67.



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