

Comparing Manual Kinematics of Showing and Telling: Harnessing the combined power of corpus work and motion capture

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This presentation addresses methodological issues related to the study of manual kinematics in Finnish Sign Language (FinSL) narratives. We ask how manual movement compares between plain telling (PT), the use of conventionalised form-meaning pairings, and constructed action (CA) (see Jantunen, 2022, for a description of the continuum). CA is a strategy whereby one can depict or show a referent's actions by enacting their bodily behaviour, utterances, or thoughts (Cormier et al., 2015). Studies on PT and CA have already addressed the kinematics of head and torso movements (Jantunen et al., 2020; Stamp et al., 2023) as well as of hand movements (Stamp et al., 2023). In this presentation, we provide new suggestions for the further exploration of manual kinematics in signed languages (SLs) based on the combination of motion capture analysis, corpus work, and the inclusion of conceptual insights gained from prior studies.

We show how both enacting and non-enacting discourse stretches can deviate from prototypical PT (use of hands to produce highly descriptive material) and CA (use of the whole body, including hands, to enact). Indeed, signed discourse, with or without CA, involves manual actions of diverse semiotics. First, CA can be divided in different degrees – *overt*, *reduced*, and *subtle*. In the latter two instances, the signer may enact a referent, but their hands produce non-enacting material (Cormier et al., 2015). Second, whether there is CA or not, the ways signers *tell* with their hands may rarely be 'plain'. One may, for instance, find highly dynamic depicting or indicating signs (e.g., Ferrara and Hodge, 2018; Stamp et al., 2023).

Because hands play such an important role in signed discourse and because CA is a frequent strategy in SLs, a better understanding of manual kinematics involves going beyond the binary PT-CA distinction and considering more complex semiotic composites. In this presentation, the above-mentioned methodological issues will be exemplified using annotated corpus materials time-aligned with motion capture measurements of spatial displacement (e.g., mean distance between wrist and torso) and time derivatives (velocity and acceleration) (Jantunen et al., 2022).

References

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