

Copy and frame: The pattern of framing repetition in LSFB (French Belgian Sign Language)

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Iteration is pervasive in language at all levels of linguistic analysis. A distinction is commonly made between reduplication and repetition, even though they are acknowledged to partially overlap (Freywald and Finkbeiner 2018). Reduplication is generally regarded as a grammatical process that applies below the word level and is related to phonological, morphological, and syntactic phenomena. Repetition is considered as a pragmatic or discourse-related process that takes place above the word level. Interest in repetition emerged with the development of conversation analysis, interaction, and acquisition studies (Tannen 2007, Clark and Bernicot 2008). Similarly, in signed languages (SLs), reduplication and repetition have been shown to play a role in grammar, meaning cohesion and progression, information structure, and interaction (Pfau and Steinbach 2006, Kimmelman 2013 and 2018, Notarrigo and Meurant 2019).

This presentation focuses on framing repetition, i.e. cases where the repeated element (A) frames a central component (B), thus creating an [A-B-A] type sequence. In terms of the laws of perception (or 'Gestalt'), the delimiting power of this structure is particularly strong. It is often used as an overall structure in novels and films, though less so in (political) speeches (Park-Derrington 2021). In SLs, however, the use of framing repetition has been documented in different production contexts and its role at both grammatical and pragmatic levels has been demonstrated. Fischer and Janis (1990) were the first to study a specific case in ASL (American Sign Language), known as 'verb sandwiches', where a verb is repeated at the beginning and end of a sequence. Since then, framing structures have been attested in various signed languages under different names: bracketing structure (Vermeerbergen and De Vriendt 1994), topic copying (Crasborn et al. 2009), or doubling (Filipczak and Mostowski 2013, Kimmelman 2013 and 2018). Such structures have also been found in spoken languages and described as a source of intralinguistic variation, e.g., in dialects of Italian (Dovicchi 2010) and Dutch (Barbiers 2014).

From a perspective that encompasses both grammatical and discourse levels, we examine the use of framing repetition in LSFB (French Belgian Sign Language) in the productions of 10 signers, using a sample of approximately 65 minutes of narrations and conversations from the LSFB Corpus (Meurant 2015). Beyond the diversity of the identified occurrences, in terms of the type and size of the repeated elements and the dimension of the [A-B-A] structures, it becomes clear that framing repetitions function as a shared and productive motif at both microstructural and macrostructural levels of LSFB. This pattern might be considered culturally institutionalized in the community (Tannen 2007).

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