Comparing Multimodal Enactment in LSFB and Belgian French: A corpus-based study of enacting articulators and degrees of constructed action

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Enactment (or *constructed action*), the use of one's body to depict a referent from an internal perspective, has become a well-known multimodal depictive strategy in linguistics and gesture studies (McNeill 1992, Cormier et al. 2015, Stec et al. 2016, Jantunen 2022). While the comparability of enactment in signed and spoken languages has long been a research object in signed language linguistics (Liddell and Metzger 1998), it is only recently that researchers have availed themselves of larger, more diverse and comparable datasets to carry out cross-linguistic studies (Hodge et al. 2019, Parisot and Saunders 2022, Quinto-Pozos et al. 2022, Hodge et al. 2023).

The aim of this presentation is to contribute to this line of research by reporting on a cross-linguistic study of LSFB (French Belgian Sign Language) signers' and Belgian French speakers' multimodal enactment practices. Exploiting annotations carried out in a subset of the LSFB and FRAPé corpora, the use of enactment is analysed in the discourse of ten LSFB signers and ten Belgian French speakers performing two tasks, i.e., a conversational task about language attitudes and a narrative retelling task. While most studies comparing enactment in signed and spoken languages so far address the frequency of enactment practices, the present work also focuses on two additional questions.

First, it analyses the (multimodal) articulatory signature of constructed action by asking how many and which articulators contribute to enactment in LSFB and Belgian French, notably using heatmap dendrograms. Second, it examines the distribution of CA degrees – subtle, reduced or overt – in both languages as a window into the overlap (or lack thereof) between enacting and non-enacting material. The study shows that the two language groups exhibit partly different articulatory signatures as well as different distributions of CA degrees, at least in the narrative retelling task. Potential explanations for identified differences are explored by considering the impact of multiple causal frames (Enfield 2014).

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