Exclusive Pronouns in ASL and BSL

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Reference in signed languages

• Reference: highly indexic
  – Indexic signs, e.g. pronouns
• Indexicality: The extent to which a sign “points to” its referent(s)
• Variation in indexicality
  – Some signs more indexic than others
  – Some sign languages more indexic than others(?)

Liddell’s analysis

• Liddell’s analysis (1994 and onwards)
  – Argues use of space is gestural
    • Pronouns and verbs “point to” their referents same as hearing people point
  – Proposed for ASL but adopted for other sign languages as well
  – Assumption: Use of signing space for reference is same across signed languages
Loss of indexicality

- First person plural pronouns
  - Historical change with ASL sign WE (Klima & Bellugi 1979)
    - Series of pointing signs to each referent → 2 points to the chest
  - Indexicality with first person plural referents not as important?
    - What about when particular referents are included/excluded?
    - Inclusive/exclusive marking with first person plurals?
    - Different signed languages? (ASL & BSL)

Inclusive/exclusive study

- Goal: To determine if ASL and BSL have inclusive/exclusive distinction
  - Phonetic expression
    - Inclusive/exclusive marking (if it exists)
    - First person plurals in general
  - Indexicality

Methods

- Participants
  - 3 Deaf native ASL signers, 3 Deaf native BSL signers
- Stimuli
  - List of statements in English using we, us, our, each in different contexts (some including addressee, some not)
  - Example sentence: We like cats
    - Inclusive context: We (including you) like cats
    - Exclusive context: We (excluding you) like cats
  - Visual aids used to help signer imagine location of referents in discourse
    - Location of visual aids as variable
Results

- Main parameter modified in different contexts: Location
- Use of location  2 categories
  - Ostensive plurals
  - Lexical plurals

Ostensive vs. Lexical Plurals

- Ostensive plurals (e.g. TWO-OF-US)
  - Point or movement toward addressee: Inclusive context only
    - TWO-OF-US [ref-add] “we including you”
    - *TWO-OF-US [ref-add] “we excluding you”
  - No point or movement toward addressee: Exclusive context only
    - *TWO-OF-US [ref-not-add] “we including you”
    - TWO-OF-US [ref-not-add] “we excluding you”
  - No inclusive/exclusive grammatical marking posited for ostensive plurals - these signs directly indicate their referents

- Lexical plurals (e.g. WE, 3/4/5-OF-US)
  - Center: Neutral, can be used in both inclusive and exclusive contexts
    - WE[center] “we including you”
    - WE[center] “we excluding you”
  - Displaced: Exclusive context only
    - *WE[displaced] “we including you”
    - WE[displaced] “we excluding you”
  - Displacement: grammatical exclusive marking for lexical plurals
Summary

- Center: Neutral, can be used in both inclusive and exclusive contexts
- Displaced: Exclusive only
  - Can exclude any salient referent
  - How indexic are these exclusive forms?

Indexicality coding

![Indexicality diagram]

Indexicality results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ASL</th>
<th>BSL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excl pronouns indexic</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(pronoun/referent match)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excl pronouns non-indexic</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(pronoun/referent mismatch)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of excl pronouns</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage indexicality</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td>97.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- BSL exclusive pronouns far more indexic than ASL
- 30 non-indexic tokens in ASL - various contexts
- 3 non-indexic tokens in BSL?
Non-indexic BSL tokens

- If excluded referent is explicitly identified:
  - Indexic displacement not necessary; pronoun displacement need not match location of referents
    E.g. referents on the left:
    ALL[right] LIKE CAT, YOU NOTHING
    “All of us like cats, but not you”
  - Displacement need not occur at all
    E.g. referents on the left:
    3-OF-US[center] LIKE CAT, YOU NOTHING
    “The three of us like cats, but not you”
- This may vary across signers - the 3 BSL non-indexic tokens are all from the same signer

Displacement in ASL & BSL

- Exclusive marking in both languages: Marked by displacement of pronoun to left or right side
- In ASL: Displacement need not indexically match included referents
- In BSL: Displacement must match included referents
  - Displacement not necessary if excluded referent is explicitly identified
    3-OF-US, YOU NOTHING
    “the three of us, but not you”

Conclusion

- Use of space for reference, how signs point to their referents, thought to be uniform across sign languages
- Here, difference in indexicality between ASL and BSL
  - BSL exclusive pronouns are indexic as Liddell’s model predicts
  - ASL exclusive pronouns need not be indexic. Why?
  - Possible different stages in grammaticisation…
    Exclusive marking in ASL has become grammaticised to allow for loss of indexicality while BSL has not (yet?)