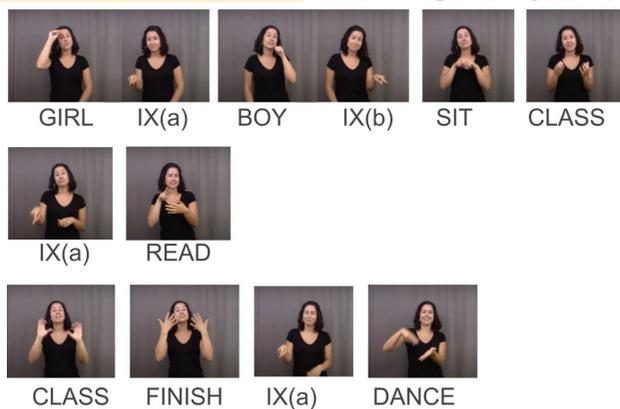


Embracing optionality: Pragmatic constraints on loci

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Spatial locus use in ASL indexical pointing (a, b):



In formal syntax/semantics, loci compared to various grammatical functions which are seen as obligatory:

- On directional verbs as verbal **agreement** (Fischer & Gough 1978, Lillo-Martin & Meier 2011, Padden 1983, Janis 1995, Meir 1998, Pfau, Salzmann, & Steinbach 2018)
- On indexical points as pronouns with the kind of **features** found on spoken language pronouns (Neidle 2000, Kun 2016) or to semantic **indices** (Lillo-Martin & Klima 1990)

Compare: *He sits* ✓ / *He sit* ✗ (3P-Sing omitted)

But **corpus** studies of directional verbs (Schembri, Cormier, & Fenlon 2018) and **production** studies of pronouns (Frederiksen & Mayberry 2016) suggest quite a lot of *optionality* in the use of loci!

*GOAL: Emphasize that **optionality** is an expected part of grammar in both spoken and sign languages, by investigating **pragmatic constraints** on locus use*

I. Verb and IX locus use depends on number (1 vs. 2 referents)

- (1) BOY ENTER CLUB. MUSIC IS-ON. DANCE. (3/3)
- (2) BOY ENTER CLUB. SEE GIRL READ. MUSIC IS-ON. DANCE. (1/3)
- (3) BOY IX_A ENTER CLUB SEE GIRL IX_B READ. (IX_A) DANCE_A. (3/3)
'A boy entered a club. (He saw a girl read.) Music went on. He danced.'

II. Verb locus use depends on narrative disambiguation

- (4) SUE HANG-OUT MARY. PUSH. (0/3)
- (5) SUE IX_A HANG-OUT MARY IX_B. (IX_A) A PUSH_B (IX_B). (3/3)
- (6) SUE HANG-OUT MARY. MARY SAY SOMETHING. SUE ANGRY. PUSH. (3/3)
'Sue was hanging out with Mary. (Mary said something. Sue got angry.) She pushed her.'

(judgments from 3 native signers of ASL)

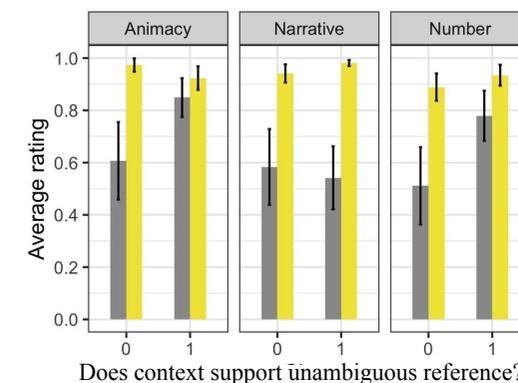
Summary: Pragmatic effects, seen e.g. in the acceptability of the same verb with loci (e.g. A PUSH_B) vs. the exact same verb without loci (e.g. PUSH).

More details: An ambiguous context makes for less acceptable use of plain verbs ((2) and (4), as compared with (3) and (5)) but disambiguation by the context via only one salient reference (1) or by the narrative (6) supports a "plain directional" verb.

Experimental data:

(Qualtrics survey, n=9)

Participants rated naturalness of minimal pair utterances with (yellow) and without (gray) loci, depending on whether reference was unambiguous (0 for no/1 for yes, e.g (4) and (6)) across 3 different pragmatic means of clarifying reference:



Conclusions:

"Optionality" in loci has focused on variation within verbs (e.g. Padden 1986), but optionality across different contexts, has been underappreciated, and is "rule governed" as well (via pragmatics!)

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