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Recognizing Complexity in Children's Signed Narratives

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Outline for today

1

Multimodality

What does it mean to say that human language and language development are multimodal?

2

Child ASL Narratives

What kinds of things do linguists notice when they analyze children's narratives in ASL?

3

Hands-on analysis

What do children's ASL narratives tell you about their signing proficiency?

1a. Human language is multimodal.

Viewpoint

Depicting an experiencing self via signer's facial affect

Depicting a body via signer's body

Depicting scene from within— internal

Signer's body external to depiction

Other

Different types of manual expressions that may be used with depiction

Different types of non-manual expressions, made with the mouth, face, head, and body, that can be produced with manual depiction

**1b. Language acquisition
is multimodal.**

MYTH

“...you can’t learn spoken language and sign language at the same time... if you start teaching little kids sign language... they’re going to get the visual and they’re not going to respond to the listening.”

Jane Madell, Audiologist



Actually...

Infants' brains are designed to seek patterns in their linguistic environment. Newborns are especially good at finding prosodic patterns of language, both auditory and visual. Visual and auditory information are not competing, but rather complement each other.

Newborns are very attuned to prosodic patterns

Monolingual babies can distinguish between certain spoken language pairs very early in life:



French vs. Russian



English vs. Italian



English vs. Japanese



However, they could not discriminate English from Dutch, which have similar rhythmic and stress patterns (**prosody**). (Mehler et al. 1988, Nazzi et al. 2000)

Hearing babies are attuned to visual prosodic patterns, too



Krentz & Corina (2008)

6-month olds: ✓ Looked significantly longer at ASL (complex +linguistic) than at pantomime (complex).

10-month olds: ✗ Showed no significant preference.



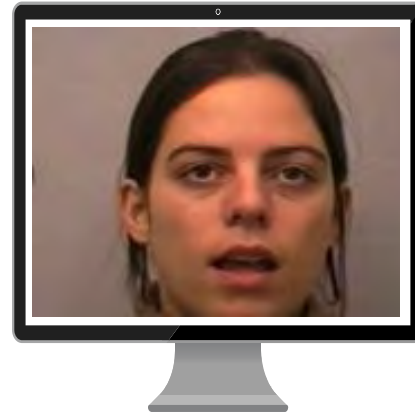
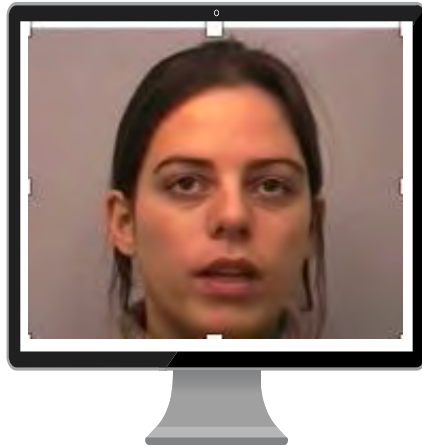
Stone, Pettito & Bosworth (2018)

6-month olds: ✓ Looked longer at well-formed fingerspelling video

12-month olds: ✗ Showed no preference.

Hearing babies use visual information to learn oral language

French and English sound different, but do they look different? In which silent video is the woman reading French? In which is she reading English? (Weikum et al. 2007)



Bilingual babies maintain attention to visual patterns longer (a bilingual advantage)



At 4 & 6 months



At 8 months



Weikum et al. (2007)

Hearing infants' sign language discrimination



Habituation Phase

Half of the infants watch JSL videos. The other half watch BSL videos.



Test Phase

Infants watch 6 video clips of the same signer in the other sign language. Do they notice the change?

- 6-month old hearing, non-signing babies looked longer at the unfamiliar (new) sign language; 12-month old babies did not. (Nácar et al. 2017)
- Blau (in prep) will test *deaf* babies' discrimination of sign languages.

Natural language is multimodal, encoding important linguistic information in more than one channel. Visual information is important even for spoken languages.

All infants are born well-equipped to notice visual patterns of natural language and exploit them for language learning; these visual patterns are not a “distraction.”

2. Child ASL Narratives

What kinds of things do linguists notice when they analyze children's narratives in ASL?

Narratives as predictors of children's language skills

- In SpL, children's narrative abilities at age 5 predict reading comprehension skills as age 8 (Griffin et al. 2004)
- ASL skills and English reading skills show a positive relationship throughout the lifespan (Strong & Prinz 1997; Chamberlain & Mayberry 2008)



Workshop Videos for Analysis

IMPORTANT REMINDER!!

We have permission to analyze this Deaf child's signing for workshop discussions, but please respect the parents' wishes and do not download any portion of the video. Thanks!

POWERED BY weebly

Narratives are a rich source of linguistic data, since there are so many ways to construct a good narrative. Children take a long time to master and coordinate various elements of

Go to <http://signanalysis.weebly.com/workshop-videos.html>

Access the videos for this presentation at the website shown on the left, entitled "Workshop Videos for Analysis"

"The Lollipop" stimulus



Extrait de "L'attaque de la sucette rose" par Thomas Szabo (2006)

Basic structure of a narrative (Labov 1972)

ABSTRACT

What is the story about?

ORIENTATION

Who is involved? Where does the story take place?

COMPLICATING ACTION

What happened?

RESOLUTION

What happened in the end?

CODA

Signals end of study, links back to the here and now.

EVALUATION

So what? What lesson did we learn?

Additional characteristics of adult ASL narratives

Video of Deaf adult retelling of Lollipop story
(adult control)

Reilly (2000)

EYE GAZE

Eye gaze towards addressee when signer is narrator; eye gaze shifts away during referential shift.

LABEL CHARACTERS

Characters often labeled before signer enters referential shift

BODY SHIFT

Body may shift to side during

What elements does the adult signer's narrative include?

ABSTRACT

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EVALUATION

So what? What lesson did we learn?

**How do ASL narratives by
Deaf children compare?**

**"The Lollipop"
by a Deaf child
from Deaf
family [age 7;0]**



Some elements Paul notices



Some elements Debbie notices

Use of null subject



FLY is introduced with fingerspelling, then maintained in the next sentence with an adult-like null subject.

Two-handed FALL



Two handed FALL, although only one stick is falling → sympathy error, common especially in younger signers

Labeling SPIDER before shift



After she finishes the episode about the flies and ants, she labels SPIDER before entering into referential shift.

3. Hands-on Analysis

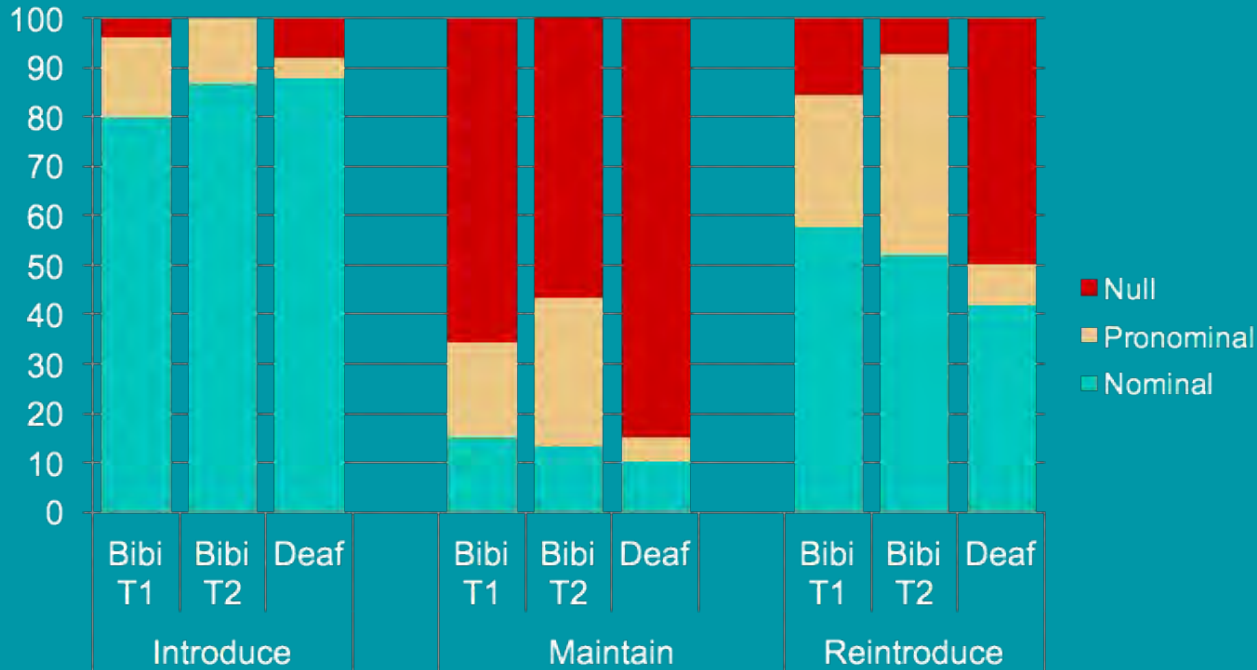
What do children's ASL narratives tell YOU about their signing proficiency?

What do you notice in the children's narratives? Here is a checklist of some elements to look for:

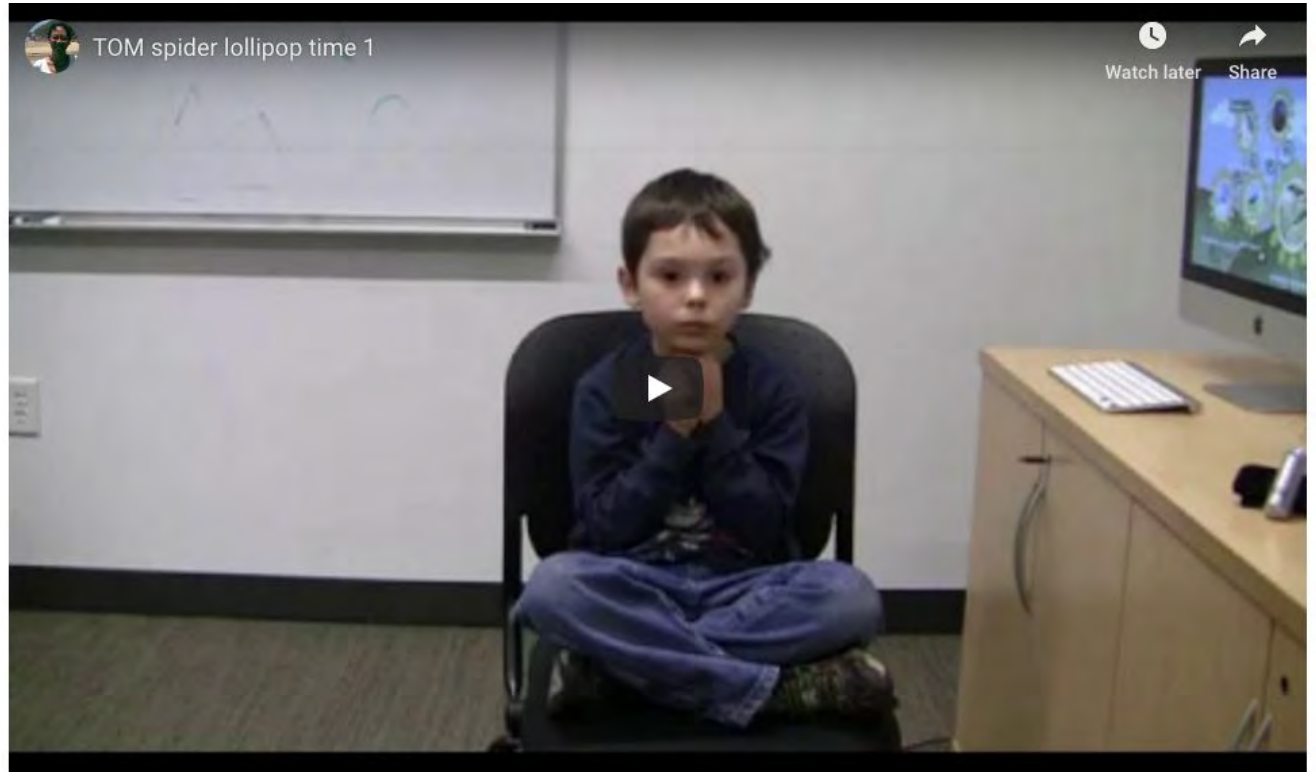
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**What about narratives by
Kodas?**

Reynolds (2016) found high use of pronouns in the signed narratives of heritage ASL signers



**"The Lollipop"
by a Koda child
from Deaf
family [age 6;9]**





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