

1. Introduction

Polish Sign Language (*Polski Język Migowy*, hereinafter **PJM**) is an understudied natural sign language used by the Deaf community in Poland. Its grammatical structure is completely **different** from spoken Polish.

The aim of this poster is to discuss the grammatical properties of the word class of **'pronouns'** in that language, and to analyze them from the perspective of generative grammar.

2. 'Demonstratives' in PJM

What is the status of **pointing** in sign languages?

One of the most characteristic typological features of sign languages around the world is a close relationship between **indexical pointing** and **deixis**.

The focus of attention of this poster is on PJM constructions containing the so-called **pointing sign** (an index handshape directed to a point in the signing space).



[photos taken from Czajkowska-Kisil (in preparation)]

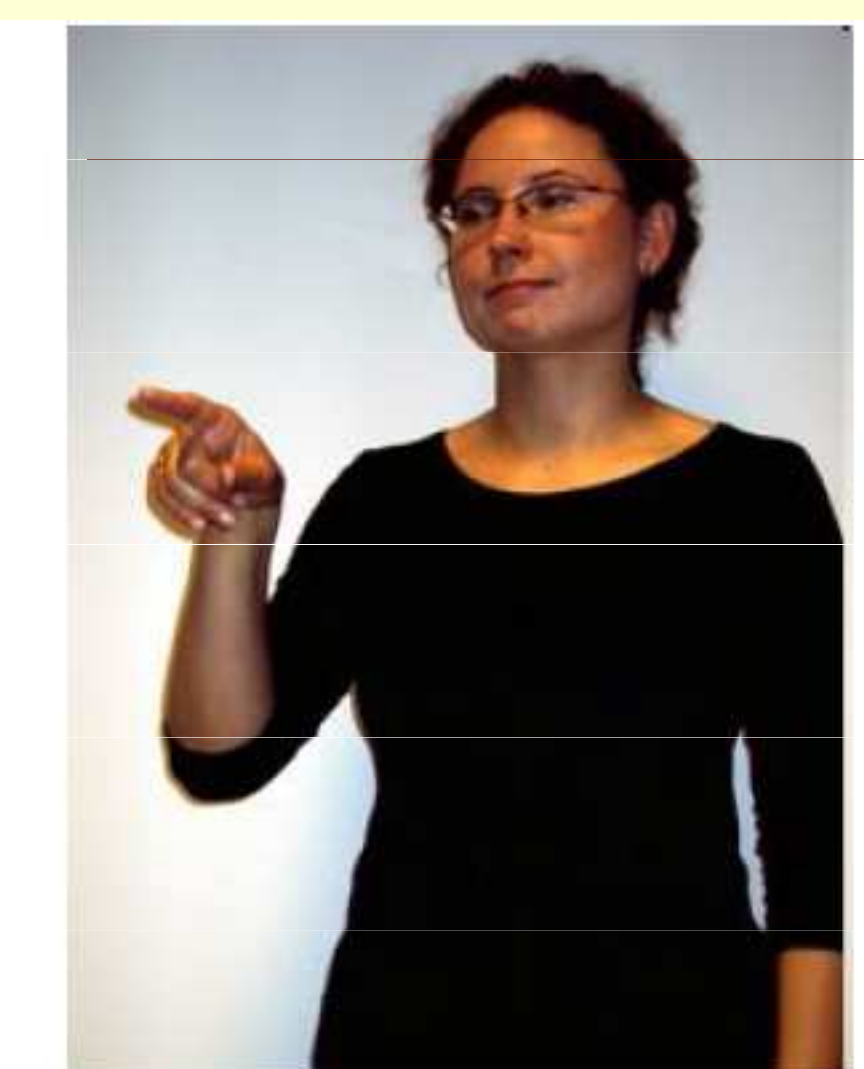


Should the indexical be viewed as a **grammaticalized** linguistic element or a mere **gesture**?

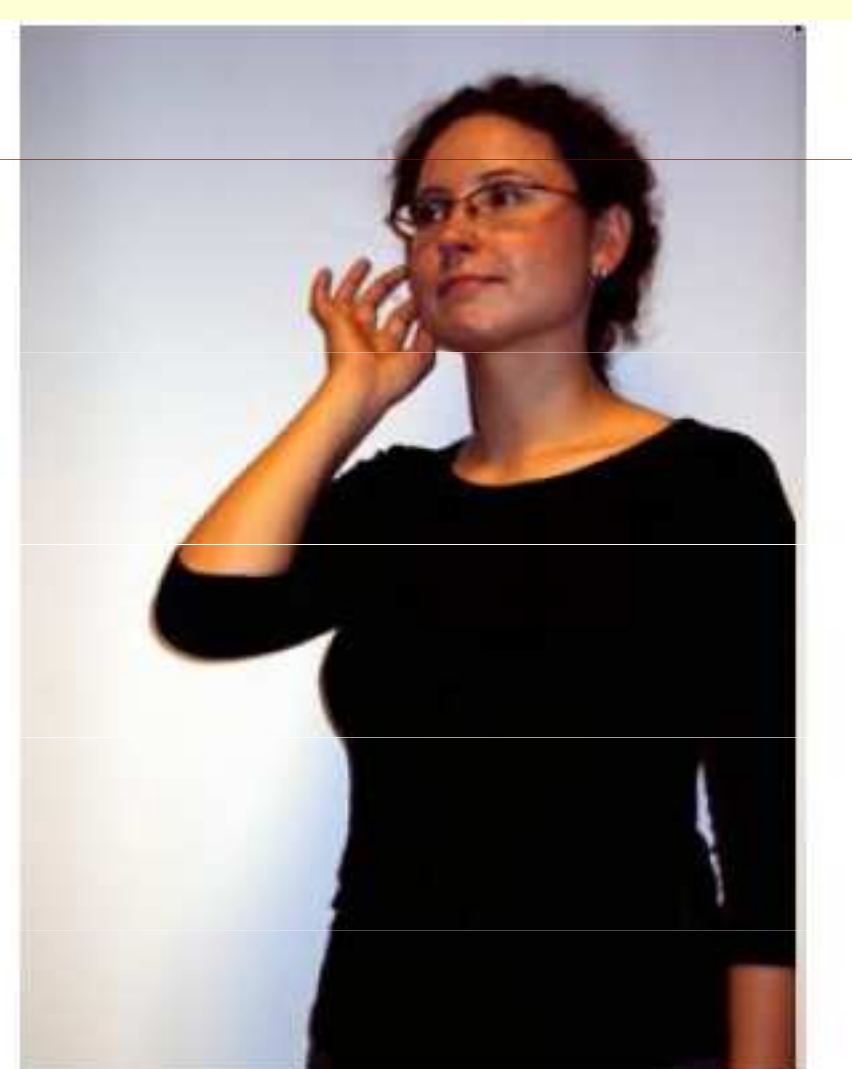
The most obvious categorial interpretation: the sign in question is a **pronoun**. Its use is clearly deictic. It may be treated as analogous to demonstratives in spoken languages.

The pointing sign may be used in two ways: it may specify the reference of an **accompanying noun** (INDEX GIRL = 'this girl') or stand **alone** (INDEX = 'this one').

Problem: in the latter use the demonstrative is **indistinguishable** from 'personal pronouns'.



'this'



'girl'

3. 'Personal pronouns' in PJM

One possibility of analysis: PJM has a **tripartite** system of personal pronouns :

1st person - an index handshape directed towards the **speaker**;

2nd person - an index handshape directed towards the person **spoken to**;

3rd person - an index handshape directed towards one of a potentially **infinite number of points** in the signing space, previously associated with the referent in question.

In this approach, the signing space should be interpreted as a **morpho-phonological** feature equivalent to the category of **person** - the place of articulation is one of the contrastive diacritics of a sign.

Some researchers: 'personal pronouns' in sign languages are also inflected for **number** (an arc = plurality).

By analogy, one would also need to say that demonstratives are also inflected for number. Problem: what about pointing gestures in **oral** communication? Are they also **inflected**?

A different view: Liddell (2003):

- the use of space for pointing is purely **gestural** (gradient) rather than linguistic; all pronouns are simply deictic points;
- pronouns (and verbs) "point to" their referents in the same way as hearing people point to locations while gesturing.

The facts from PJM seem to support this view:

- there are no reasons to distinguish first and non-first person; even "first-person" pronouns may be subject to **displacement**, e.g. when telling a story about oneself.

Three possibilities:

- INDEX₁ CLASSIFIER_{SITTING-LOCATION_α}
- POSS₁ SISTER CLASSIFIER_{SITTING-LOCATION_B}
- INDEX₁ GIVE_{LOCATION_α-LOCATION_B}
- INDEX₁ CLASSIFIER_{SITTING-LOCATION_α}
- POSS₁ SISTER CLASSIFIER_{SITTING-LOCATION_B}
- INDEX₀ GIVE_{LOCATION_α-LOCATION_B}
- INDEX₁ CLASSIFIER_{SITTING-LOCATION_α}
- POSS₁ SISTER CLASSIFIER_{SITTING-LOCATION_B}
- GIVE_{LOCATION_α-LOCATION_B}

Cormier (2007): pronouns in sign languages evolve (they gradually lose their indexical/gestural character and become more conventionalized).

Example from ASL: the progression of the sign WE from a series of pointing signs to each referent (ME + HIM + HER + HIM + YOU ... + ME) to the current sign that consists of only two points on the signer's chest:



This kind of lexicalization has not taken place in PJM. Therefore, we can see no reason to assume that PJM pointing signs are substantially different from pointing gestures in oral communication.

Similar conclusions: Trevor Johnston's work on pointing in Auslan (Johnston (2010)).

However, this **doesn't** mean that pointing has no grammatical function!

Interestingly, the basic form of the pointing sign is only used **deictically** (to point to an entity available in the signing space), and not discourse-anaphorically (coreferential to some antecedent in the preceding context).

In the latter context a different sign (ANAPHOR) is used.

Example:

POSS₁ COLLEAGUE NOT WORK TODAY
BUT INDEX₁ SEE ANAPHOR YESTERDAY

Note that the reference may be indicated not only by the 'pronoun' itself but also by the direction of other ('non-pronominal') elements.

Does it mean that they are also 'inflected for person'?

Example:

How old are you?

IND₂ LIFE HOW-MUCH

LIFE HOW-MUCH₂

4. Analysis: DP in PSL

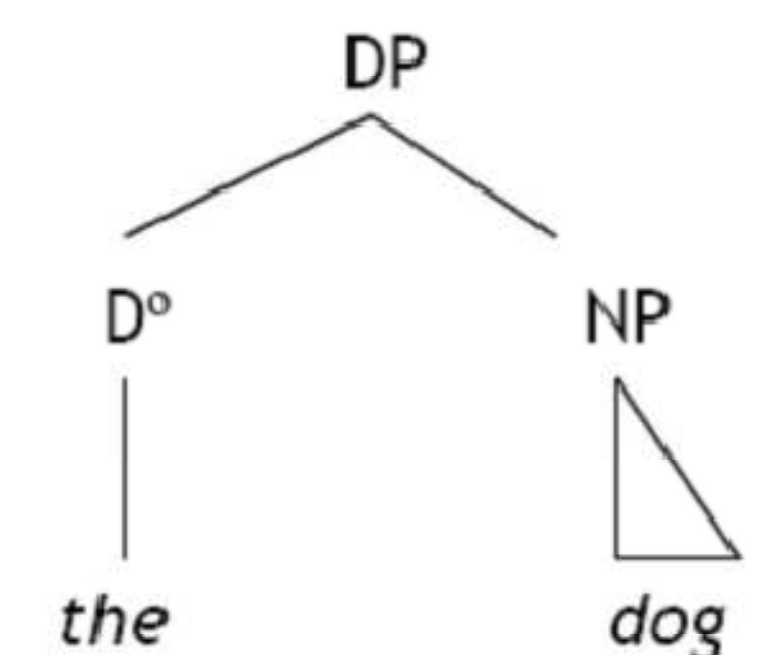
We interpret the fact that the PJM 'personal pronouns' and 'demonstratives' are based on the **same** handshape as an indication that they are instances of the same pointing gesture.

Its proper interpretation is derived **contextually** similarly to spoken languages:

She₁ and she₂ are both students.

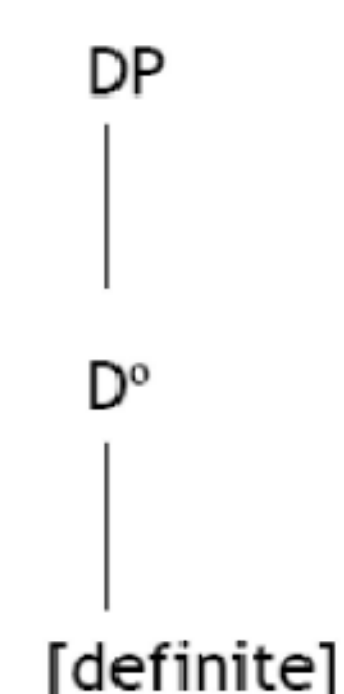
The exact denotation of a pronoun is **not** a form feature - what we have is only [3rd person singular feminine definite].

Abney's (1987) **Determiner Phrase** hypothesis: what has traditionally been assumed to be the highest layer in the nominal structure (the NP) is in fact dominated by **functional** material, headed by the D(eterminer).



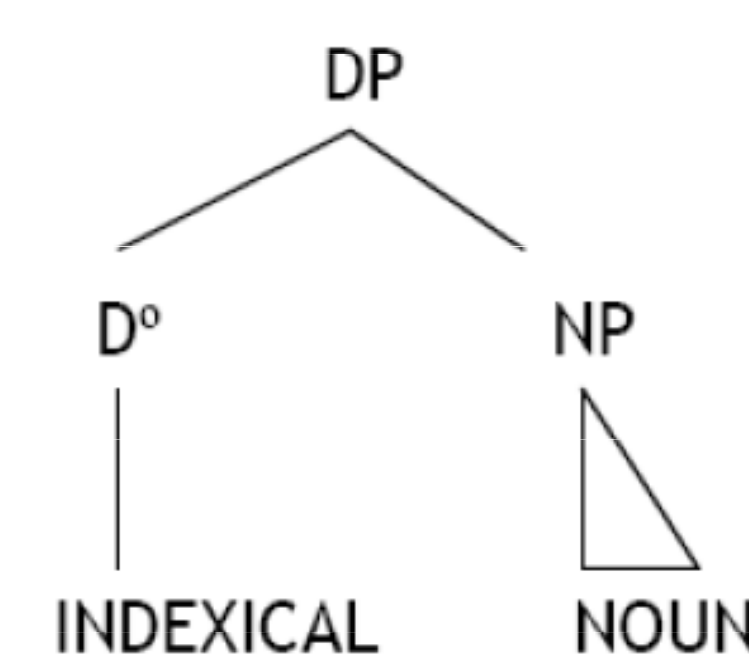
Unlike pronouns in spoken languages, the PJM pointing sign it is **not** associated with person or number features. The **only** formal feature associated with the pointing sign is that of **definiteness** (therefore, it resembles definite articles in spoken languages).

If we assume the DP model, the structure for the PJM pointing sign would look as follows:



PJM sequences such as (1) could be analyzed as follows: the indexical occupies the head of DP (as a reference marker).

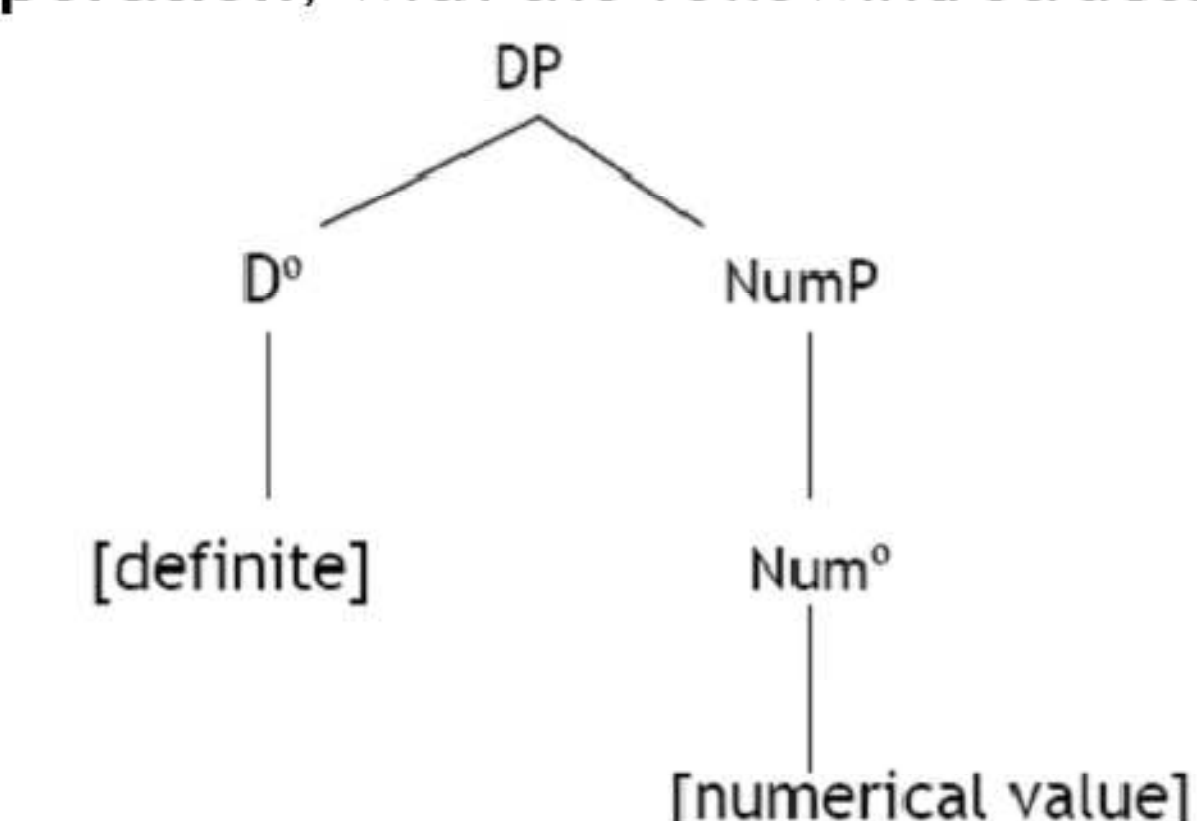
(1) INDEXICAL NOUN



There is no **separate** class of 'personal pronouns' in PJM. Diessel (2006) observes that crosslinguistically, personal pronouns are historically **derived** from demonstratives, meaning that the latter are more basic and belong to the universal set of core vocabulary

According to some linguists, in PJM there is not only [singular] and [plural], but also [trial] and [quadral], which can be seen in examples such as TWO-OF-US, FOUR-OF-YOU etc.

Our view: structures such as 'three of them' or 'four of us' should not be treated as instances of inflection, but rather as instances of **numeral incorporation**, with the following structure:



Different classes of pronouns in PJM?

<i>Who did it?</i>	[answer: <i>He.</i>]
<i>Which car is broken?</i>	[answer: <i>This one.</i>]
<i>What did you buy?</i>	[answer: <i>This.</i>]
<i>Whose pen is this?</i>	[answer: <i>His.</i>]
<i>How should I put it?</i>	[answer: <i>Like this.</i>]
<i>How much milk did you buy?</i>	[answer: <i>That much.</i>]
<i>Where is your pen?</i>	[answer: <i>There.</i>]

In PJM the answer may always be the same: **THE DETERMINER**

