Pointing in SL and SpL: Anchoring vs Positioning

Gemma Barberà
UNIVERSITAT POMPEU FABRA

Martine Zwets
Radboud University Nijmegen

Point of departure

Pointings in sign language (SL) and spoken language (SpL) show phonological resemblance to a large extent.

However:
Pointing gesture ≠ pointing sign

Difference in discursive function

Analysis of pointings to non-sender, non-addressee oriented referents in Catalan Sign Language and spoken Dutch.

Reference & modality

Concrete reference
Reference with an orientation towards an object, which is physically present.

Abstract reference
Reference with an orientation towards a location, to refer to something that is not physically present.

Modality
SL → Visual-gestural modality
SpL → Dominant: audio-vocal modality
Dependent: visual-gestural modality

Differences
*Productive abstract reference (SL) versus unproductive abstract reference (SpL)

*Coreferentiality (SL) versus autonomous pointings (SpL)

Anchoring vs Positioning

File cards
Reference tracking = file management
For every discourse referent a file card is created. Information to these file cards is added and new file-cards are created (Heim 1988).

Anchoring
= creation of a file card by a pointing

woman (x)
x tells y
x says to y

Positioning
= spatio-temporal information given by a pointing.
The pointing is added as a NP apposition (two adjacent units denoting identical referent)

man (x)
x has coffee
x seated to the right of

Stay local principle in SL**:** When a discourse referent is physically present, use an anchor for reference which coincides with the position of the object

Positioning in SL

Reference to a book present in the physical context

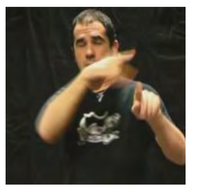
IX3 BOOK
"There is a book…"

IX3 BOOK TRADITIONAL
"Books are traditional…"

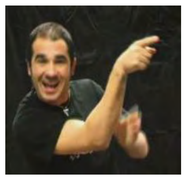
→ Anchor-establisher + position-giver

Anchoring in SL

WOMAN **IX3**
first mention



IX3 3-TELL-1
second mention



IX3 3-SAY-1
third mention

Positioning in SpL

[hij heeft heel veel k]offie voor z'n fans
he has very much coffee for his fans
'[He has lots of c]offee for his fans'

Conclusions

Pointing signs→ anchoring & positioning
Pointing gestures→ positioning

Selected references

Clark, H. 2003. Pointing and placing. In S. Kita (Ed.), *Pointing. Where language, culture, and cognition meet* (pp. 243-268). Hillsdale NJ:Erlb.

Heim, I. 1988. *The Semantics of Definite and Indefinite Noun Phrases*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Kendon, A. 2004. *Gesture: Visible Action as Utterance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press