Expressing plural meaning in Flemish Sign Language (VGT)

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Introduction

Plural in VGT
Possible forms of plural formation:
Ways of expressing plural meaning

4 research questions:
1. Which are the possible forms of plural formation of noun signs in VGT?
2. Do particular noun signs have different possible plurals?
3. Which form of pluralisation is the preferred one in which context?
4. Are certain plural forms obligatory in certain contexts?

Possible forms of plural formation of nominal signs in VGT:

1. The citation form of the sign is changed
   1.1. By changing the manual part of the sign: reduplication or double articulation (only to express dual)
   1.2. By changing the non-manual part of the sign

2. A sign is added
   2.1. A lexical sign from the established VGT lexicon is added:
       a cardinal number: TWO MONKEY TWO
       another quantifier: MANY VARIOUS BIKE
       a collective sign: FAR GROUP BIRD FLY
   2.2. A sign from the productive lexicon:
       a classifier construction: SOLDIER THREE "holding_gun" THREE CL "person"+++
       a non-established collective sign: STONE "pile"
   2.3. A pointing sign/sweep: COW ps "there"++++ CANDY sweep

3. The sign has an inherent plural meaning: CHILDREN, CHIPS

Important findings

Alternative strategies used in order to express plural meaning:
1. Coordinated noun phrase: YOUNG SHEEP OLD SHEEP
2. Coordinated adjective phrase: CAR BLUE LEFT YELLOW RIGHT
3. A classifier predicate: CAR "cars_drive_fast_and_park"
4. Modified verb sign: reduplication or double articulation (dualis): PAN HANG+++++

Combination of all strategies

definite amount
- cardinal number

indefinite amount
- quantifier
- collective sign

definite & locative
- CL construction
- pointing sign
- non-established collective

indefinite & locative
- CL construction
- pointing sign/sweep
- non-established collective

Methodology

49 informants representing the 5 regional variants in VGT complying with:
- early acquisition of VGT
- education in a deaf school (at least at primary school level)
- daily usage of VGT (e.g. with parents, with partner, in the family, at work)
- active membership of the Flemish Deaf community

Elicitation materials: 156 pictures of 39 objects
(each object 4 pictures)
+ 2 films
commercial with cars
* cartoon with birds

one object is displayed

2 objects are displayed

a countable number of objects is displayed
an non-countable number of objects is displayed

12 hours VGT data analysed in ELAN

References