THE SYNTAX OF PRONOMINAL POINTING SIGNS IN ITALIAN SIGN LANGUAGE (LIS)

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Participants: speaker(s), addressee(s)
1st person pronouns: Specific point on the speaker’s body [+prox]
2nd person pronouns: Specific point in the space identified by the speaker’s eye gaze [-prox]
Identified elements: 3rd person pronouns/demonstratives. Specific point in the space outside of the speaker’s eye gaze [dist]
Non-identified element(s): Impersonal pronouns: Neuter space. (any point in the space outside of the speaker’s eye gaze) [-dist]

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THE POINTS OF SPACE AND ITS FEATURES

• In sign languages, indications are a system to establish reference and co-reference.
• They belong to different categories: demonstratives, articles, and personal pronouns.
• The pointing sign encodes the space features [aprox, zdist] (i.e., proximity to or distality from the speaker and the addressee).

THREE CLASSES OF PERSONAL PRONOUNS IN LIS

To classify personal pronouns, we took into account:
• their semantic properties: anaphoric vs. non-anaphoric pronouns;
• their syntactic distribution;
• their pronominal functions: e.g., the pause between the indication and previous or following signs, - the possibility of reduplicating the pointing, - the duration of indication, measured in the number of frames or fractions of seconds.

Strong pronouns:
• can be the subject; i.e., they can introduce a new referent into the discourse.
• have the same distribution as full NPs and can be substituted by a proper noun or DP.
• a pause after the pointing sign can be present.

Weak pronouns:
• must be anaphoric;
• have a special distribution: always adjacent to the verb;
• no pause (are co-articulated with the verb);
• no reduplication; short time of holding the pointing (sometimes it is imperceptible).

Clitic pronouns:
• must be anaphoric;
• have a special distribution: always adjacent to the verb;
• no pause; no reduplication; long time intermediate between a clitic and a strong pronoun.

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE NULL ARGUMENT PARAMETER

• Non-agreeing verbs (contact with the signer’s body) must co-occur with pronominal pointing signs + no null arguments
• With agreeing verbs, pronominal pointing sign can be absent + null arguments. (Lillo-Martin 2002)

If space features can be considered as the extreme contraction of the pointing sign, we could suggest that agreeing verbs do not co-occur with null arguments but with clitic pronouns.

In the following sentence, the numbers on each indication are the rate of pronominal pointing signs:
Rate 1 corresponds to a strong pronoun (about 1/2 of second – 7–13 frames)*
Rate 2 corresponds to a weak pronoun (about 1/12 of second – 1–2 frames)*
Rate 3 corresponds to a clitic pronoun (about 1/12 of second – 1–2 frames)*

The rate 3 pronouns are anaphoric: the second pronoun (pink) refers to the first occurrence of the first person pronoun; the fifth and the sixth pronouns (green) refer to the first person. These two pronouns are co-articulated with the verb: they share the handshape with TELL; furthermore, the movement starts from point (j), where the subject is located, pass on the lips, where it means TELL, and ends up on the signer’s body, that is the 1st person. (See the figures)

In the sentence below, the numbers on each indication are the rate of pronominal pointing signs:
Wi was forced to take a taxi. The taxi driver told me that busses were on strike.

The indications “1p” refer to the 1st person. The indications “j” refer to the taxi driver (3rd person).

The rate 1 pronouns do not have an antecedent. They can be reduplicated.

The first indication (blue) is the subject of the first sentence; the third indication (purple) introduces a new referent: the following NP containing a reduced relative clause. (CARj IXj MAN: non-manual expressions such as dimpled cheeks and squinted eyes found with full relative clauses). (See the figures)

The rate 3 pronouns are anaphoric: the second pronoun (pink) refers to the first occurrence of the 1st person pronoun; the fifth and the sixth pronouns (green) refer to the 1st person pronoun, respectively.

The rate 2 pronoun is contained in the complex expression CAR-IX1p-MAN.

Another occurrence of a rate 2 pronoun is in the following sentence:
This book, I have given to Peter.

The indication “1p” refers to the “1st person.” (The indication “1p” refers to the book (3rd person).

In the sentence below, the numbers on each indication are the rate of pronominal pointing signs:

Three classes of personal pronouns in SPOKEN languages:
strong: e.g. English him in coordination, I saw him and his wife
weak: e.g. English him and it, e.g. outside of coordination, where they can be reduced:
I saw/m
clitic: e.g. French le, je l’ai vu

References: