

The Effect of Emotional State on the Position of Wh-signs in Indian Sign Language

Neha Kulshreshtha

1. Introduction

In a context production task aimed at eliciting wh-interrogatives in different contexts based on different emotion types and information types, it was found that emotional state can influence the position of wh-signs in Indian Sign Language (ISL). Previous research (Aboh et al., 2005; Zeshan, 2004; Kulshreshtha, 2013) has shown that wh-signs appear consistently at the clause-final position, and no other position is available. However, a recent study (Kulshreshtha, 2020) found that wh-signs can also be doubled at the clause-initial and final positions and can also appear at the clause-initial position. This study aims to show how the emotional state affects the position of the wh-signs in ISL.

2. Data

14 contexts varying in the following two parameters were designed for this task

- i. Emotion types: anger (2), surprise (2), fear (2), excitement (2), suspicion (2), amusement (2), and neutral (2).
- ii. Information type: the person asking the question already knows the answer or seeking new information. Each emotion type had examples with both information types, except for surprise, as it is difficult to find a situation in which a person is genuinely surprised when he/she already knows the answer.

The written contexts were given to a CODA to sign and record the videos. The recorded videos were sent to five participants (4 male and 1 female). The participants were asked to see each context and sign and record the most natural wh-questions that may follow. Given the context, they were asked to sign as many possible questions and constructions as possible. All the participants recorded and sent the videos online. These videos were annotated on Elan.

- | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
| <u>h-f</u> | <u>h-neu</u> | <u>h-f</u> |
| <u> </u> | <u> </u> | <u>b-r</u> |
1. PLACE₁ G-WH₁ TOGETHER₁ GO_A PLACE₁ G-WH₁ (Excitement)
“Where are we going together?”

- | | |
|--|--|
| <u>h-neu</u> <u>h-f h-d</u> <u>h-f</u> <u>h-u</u>
<u>ib-r</u> | |
|--|--|
2. TAP⁺⁺ WHO+Q ORANGE IXA EAT FINISH WHO+Q (Anger)
 “Who finished the oranges?”
- | | |
|--|--|
| <u>h-f</u> <u>h-neu</u> <u>h-f</u>
<u>b-f</u> <u>ib-r</u> | |
|--|--|
3. IX₂ WHO BOOK GIFT IX₂ WHO (Surprise)
 “Who gifted you the book?”

In the examples above (1, 2, and 3), doubled wh-signs were signed by all the participants in the contexts of anger, excitement, and surprise. In example 2, the participant reported that the sign Q in the combination of WHO+Q is only used in specific contexts like anger, suspicion, or amusement and is used only for who questions.

3. Observations

Initially, the task aimed to see if the change in context produced any change in the non-manual marking. However, the task finally showed evident variation in the position of wh-signs in ISL. It was found that participants used the doubled-wh signs in the context of anger, surprise, and excitement. The task also showed that a special interrogative sign can also be used by some participants in these contexts. In this study, I will further investigate and explain the relation between emotion types and the position of wh-signs in ISL.

4. References

- Aboh, E. O., Pfau, R., & Zeshan, U. (2005). When a Wh-word is not a Wh-word: The Case of Indian Sign Language. In R. Singh (Ed.), *The Yearbook of South Asian Languages and Linguistics (2005)* (pp. 11–43). Walter de Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110186185.11>
- Kulshreshtha, N. (2013). *Wh-Questions in Indo-Pakistani Sign Language* [M.Phil Dissertation]. University of Delhi.
- Kulshreshtha, N. (2020). Exploring wh-questions in Indian Sign Language. *FEAST. Formal and Experimental Advances in Sign Language Theory*, 3, 30–42. <https://doi.org/10.31009/FEAST.i3.03>
- Zeshan, U. (2004). Interrogative Constructions in Signed Languages: Crosslinguistic Perspectives. *Language*, 80(1), 7–39. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lan.2004.0050>