Pointing signs in HKSL have undergone a language change and have a new function similar to *uh* in English...

More than a pointing: Pointing sign as an interjective hesitator in Hong Kong Sign Language

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**INTRO**

- Interjective hesitator:
  - subcategory of filler which fills up the delay when a speaker meets a word-finding difficulty.
  - E.g. *uh* in English,
  - *ano* in Japanese,
  - *nei-ge* in Mandarin
- Pragmaticization:
  - a grammatical item
  - -> a pragmatic marker
  - E.g. *ano* in Japanese
- Are pointing signs in HKSL undergoing this process?

**METHODS**

1. 5 x 20 mins conversational data: 3 pairs of young native signers (~30yrs old) & 2 pairs of elderly signer (~60yrs old)
2. Identified non-referential & non-locative pointing signs by native signers

**RESULTS**

1. **Freq. of Pointing Hesitator by young and elder signers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Young signers</th>
<th>Elder signers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mean = 7.37, SD = 5.07</td>
<td>mean = 2.02, SD = 0.81</td>
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<tr>
<td>t(8) = 2.05, p = .03</td>
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   Young signers produced pointing hesitators significantly more than elder signers.

2. None of the hesitators pointed downward, toward the signer himself/herself, or to the ipsilateral side of the signing hand.

**DISCUSSION**

- Pragmaticization took place in HKSL.
- Pointing signs in HKSL have a new function: interjective hesitator.
- Direction of pointing interjective hesitators are not fixed, but they tend to avoid directions that would lead to misunderstanding or require strenuous wrist extension.

**MORE about pointing interjective hesitators**

- How to identify hesitators:
  i. Is the pointing sign associated with an entity or an event? (Referential?)
  ii. Would the utterance become 'bad' if the pointing sign was deleted? (Syntactically important?)
  iii. Is the pointing direction important? (Locative?)

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