

Mastering Depicting Constructions in the L1 Acquisition of Austrian Sign Language:

ISSUES OF LEXICALIZATION



ÖGS version:



ABSTRACT

- **Depicting handshapes** (DH) or *sign language classifiers* represent certain groups of referents in the morphological subsystem of **depicting constructions** (DCs)¹
- The degree of **lexicalization** varies for different DHs
- Six native-signing Deaf children were tested on their production of DHs
- **DH type (object vs. handling) influences DH selection:** With increasing age, children are more likely to select **more lexicalized object DHs** (but not more lexicalized handling DHs)

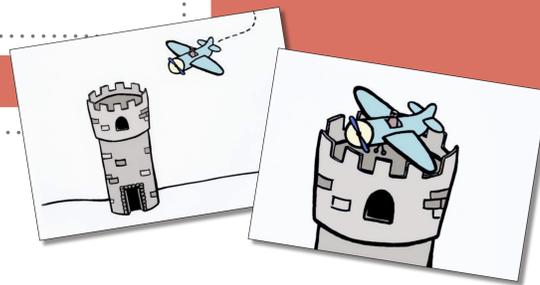


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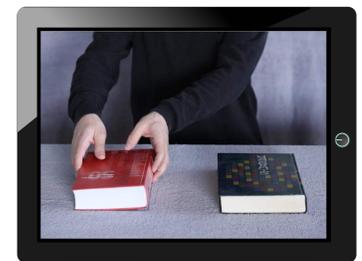
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METHODOLOGY

- **Subjects:** Six native-signing Deaf children learning Austrian Sign Language (ÖGS) aged 3;9 to 13;0
- Each child was tested on their DH productions in two tasks:
 - In **Task O1**, children were asked to describe the differences between two **picture cards** at a time to elicit non-agentive sentences containing object depicting handshapes
 - In **Task O2**, children were asked to describe **short video clips** to elicit agentive utterances using handling depicting handshapes
- The **target handshapes** were documented (Hilzensauer, 2015²) standard DHs in ÖGS varied for morphosyntactical (Schick, 1990³) and phonological (Boyes Braem, 1990⁴) complexity.
- Each child was seen individually and recorded, yielding ~90 minutes of total material. The tapes were annotated using **ELAN** and tokens were counted and rated according to type.



◀ Example picture card pair intended to elicit the Y- and C-handshape



▲ Screenshot from a video clip meant to elicit the Bc-handshape

RESULTS

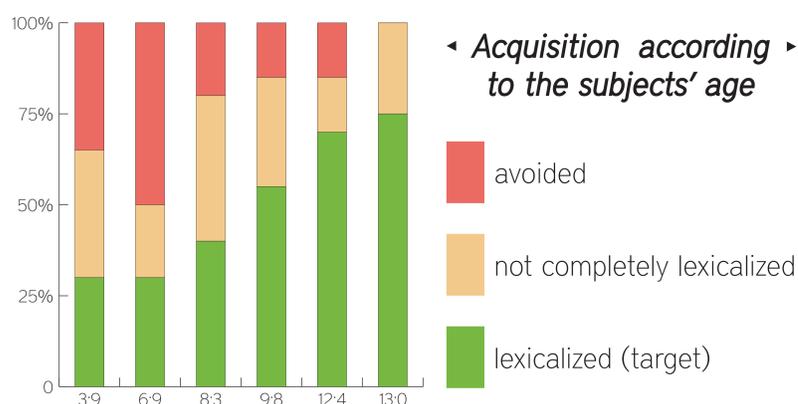


▲ Little lexicalized object DH representing an airplane (3;9)

OBJECT HANDSHAPES

- Object DH productions are more likely to correspond to the lexicalized target DHs
- With increasing age, children are more likely to choose lexicalized object DHs

- Object DHs were more likely to be avoided, resulting in responses only containing citation forms



HANDLING HANDSHAPES

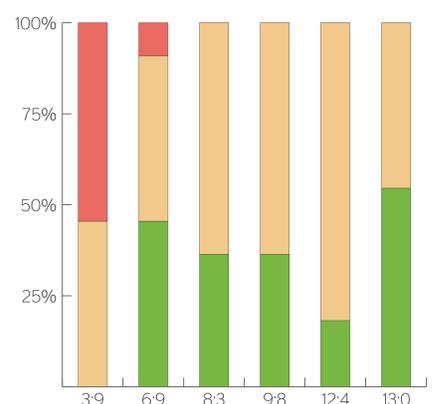
- Handling DHs are more likely to be replaced with less lexicalized forms
- Selection of more lexicalized DHs does not correlate with age



▲ Little lexicalized handling DH representing a person putting on lipstick (13;0)

Potential explanations

- Higher degree of iconicity of handling DHs -> greater influence of gesture on acquisition?
- Higher tolerance towards less lexicalized *handling* DHs in ÖGS (or all sign languages)?
- Handling DHs cannot be avoided in the same way as object DHs



¹Cormier, K., Quinto-Pozos, D., Sevcikova, Z., & Schembri, A. (2012). Lexicalisation and De-Lexicalisation Processes in Sign Languages. Comparing Depicting Constructions and Viewpoint Gestures. *Language & Communication*, 32(4), pp. 329-348.

²Boyes Braem, P. (1990). Acquisition of the Handshape in American Sign Language. A Preliminary Analysis. In W. Levelt, V. Volterra, & C. Erting (eds.), *From Gesture to Language in Hearing and Deaf Children*. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer.

³Hilzensauer, M. (2015). Ikonizität und Klassifikatoren in Gebärdensprachen. Unpublished habilitation dissertation, University of Klagenfurt.

⁴Schick, B. (1990). Classifier predicates in American Sign Language. *International Journal of Sign Linguistics*, 1(1), pp. 15-40.