Linear order: a minimal syntactic tool to express the modifier and the modified

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Introduction

- Central Taurus Sign Language (CTSL) is a village sign language that emerged spontaneously in the absence of a conventionalized language model and it currently has 36 deaf signers.
- It is a vantage point into observing the structure, or lack thereof, of a language in its infancy (Ergin, 2017; Ergin et al., 2018).
- Previous research in emergent signed systems and homesign systems provide evidence for early conventionalization of linear sequencing of the modifier and the modified (Sandler et al., 2005).
- This study investigates the emergence of word order patterns in CTSL by exploring the use of concatenation as a minimal syntactic tool to express modification.

Methods

- 12 deaf CTSL signers
- 19 target clips (scenarios with two members of the same semantic category)
- 228 responses annotated and coded as Mod-H or H-Mod

1) Target video: There is a big book and a small book and the man takes the small book.
2) Response: H-Mod (simple modification)

Results

- 134 instances of modification, 72.05% have head-modifier word order (dominant word order) —> conventionalization in phrase structure
- Opposite word order in Turkish and Turkish Sign Language —> development independent of surrounding languages
- Even the complex modification constructions can be characterized in terms of a simpler 'linear grammar' that maps directly between phonology and semantics.
- When signers used multiple modifiers to modify a single element (complex modifications) they followed the dominant order more strictly —> greater semantic complexity calls more strongly for a conventional order

Simple modification (SM): Single modifier is used. CTSL: TWO WOMAN SIT / WOMAN HAT THROW-BALL
Complex constructions:
Conjoined modifiers (CM): Multiple modifiers modify the same head. CTSL: MAN BEARD GLASSES / MAN BOOK GO
Semantic embedding (SE): A second modifier modifies the first modifier. CTSL: MAN SHIRT RED / MAN THROW-BALL
Conjoined modifiers combined with embedding (CE): Multiple modifiers modify the same head, and one of them itself has a modifier. CTSL: MAN BALD SHIRT RED LAUGH / MAN SIT

Conclusion

References