Theory-Description-Theory: A Round Trip in French Sign Language Phonology

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GOALS
Adopting/adapting the Prosodic Model (Brentari 1998) for the phonology of French Sign Language (LSF):
- Accounting for orientation issues
- Accounting for complex signs

CHALLENGES
- Empirical challenge on the size of feature inventories.
- Theoretical challenges:
  - Absolute vs. relative orientation
  - Timing units in simultaneous compounds

OVERVIEW
4 phonemic classes:
- Handshape (A)
- Location (PoA)
- Orientation (O)
- Movement (PF)

1. FEATURE SPECIFICATION: EVIDENCE FROM MINIMAL PAIRS IN LSF [±web]
   - In the Prosodic Model, no [±web] feature:
     “There is one more contact discussed by Liddell and Johnson (1989), known as ‘web’ (e.g. […]), but because H1 contacts the ulnar side of each finger of H2, ‘web’ can be treated as a subclass of ‘ulnar.’”
   - Need of [±web], evidence from the minimal pair EGG ~ SHIT:

EGG
Location: ulnar side

SHIT
Location: web

2. SECONDARY PLANE: EVIDENCE FROM ABSOLUTE ORIENTATION
   - Relative orientation: specification of the relevant part of the dominant hand relative to the relevant part of the non-dominant hand as the PoA.
   - Need of absolute orientation for MINIMUM and MAXIMUM based on relative orientation.

3- MERGE IN SIMULTANEOUS COMPOUNDS: EVIDENCE FROM TIMING UNITS
   - Single sign vs. compound:
     ➢ If single sign: representation of the movement of the dominant hand only.
   - Sequential compound vs. simultaneous compound (Santoro 2018):

CONCLUSIONS
- Addition of the feature [±web].
- Implementation of absolute orientation by inserting a secondary plane of articulation.
- Merge in simultaneous compounds for correct PoA and the alignment of timing units.

REFERENCES