

SEMIOTIC STRATEGIES IN NONMANUAL SIGNALS: A STUDY ON THE ACTIONS OF THE SIGNER'S HEAD AND BODY IN FINNISH SIGN LANGUAGE



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1. BACKGROUND

- Traditional **linguistic vs. affective nonmanuals** dichotomy in SL linguistics
- However, difficulty in differentiating between grammatical, prosodic and gestural signals (e.g. Pfau & Quer 2010; Herrmann & Steinbach 2011)
- Need for a wider semiotic approach? (see e.g. Ferrara & Hodge 2018; Capirci 2018)
- A **semiotic typology** of head & body movements on the basis of 1 h 52 min of FinSL data
 - Corpus narratives & dialogues (12 signers)
 - Synchronized motion capture & video recordings of dialogues (2 signers)
- All prosodic/grammatical/gestural signals of the head or body seen as **semiotic signs** (see Peirce 1903; Enfield 2009; Kockelman 2005)
- Involve strategies that differ in how something is interpreted as standing for something else: **iconicity** (perceptual analogies), **indexicality** (spatial, temporal or causal proximity) and **symbolicity** (a social norm)

2. A SEMIOTIC TYPOLOGY OF SIGNERS' HEAD AND BODY MOVEMENTS

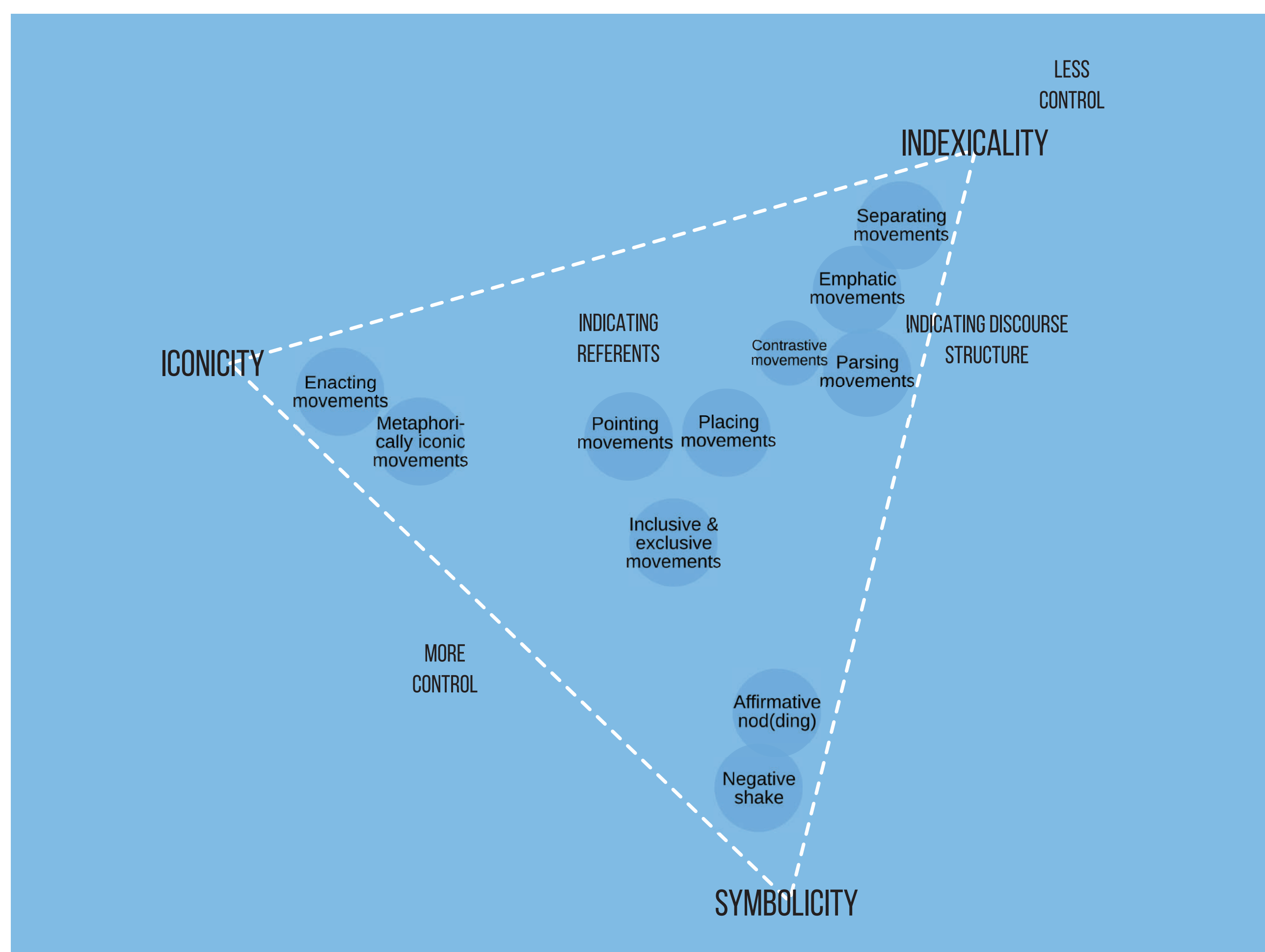


Fig 1. A typology of signers' head and body movements according to semiotic strategies.

i. Enacting



Fig. 2. An example of sideways head and body movements that enact discourse referents.

ii. Time-metaphoric

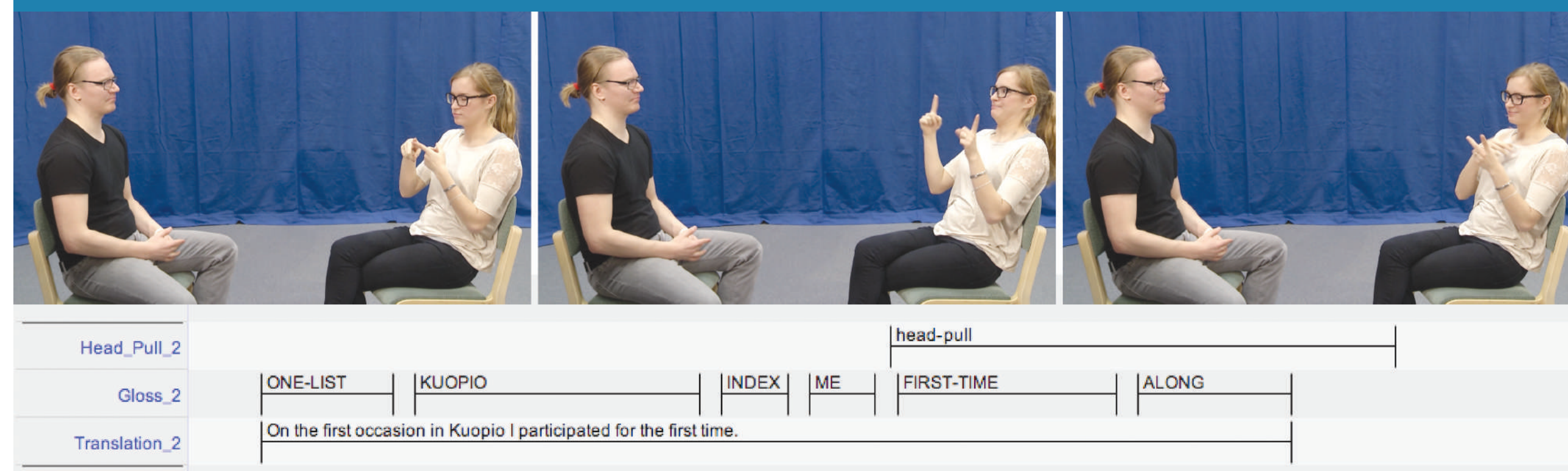


Fig. 3. An example of a backward movement of the head and body visualizing a time-related metaphor.

iii. Indicating referents

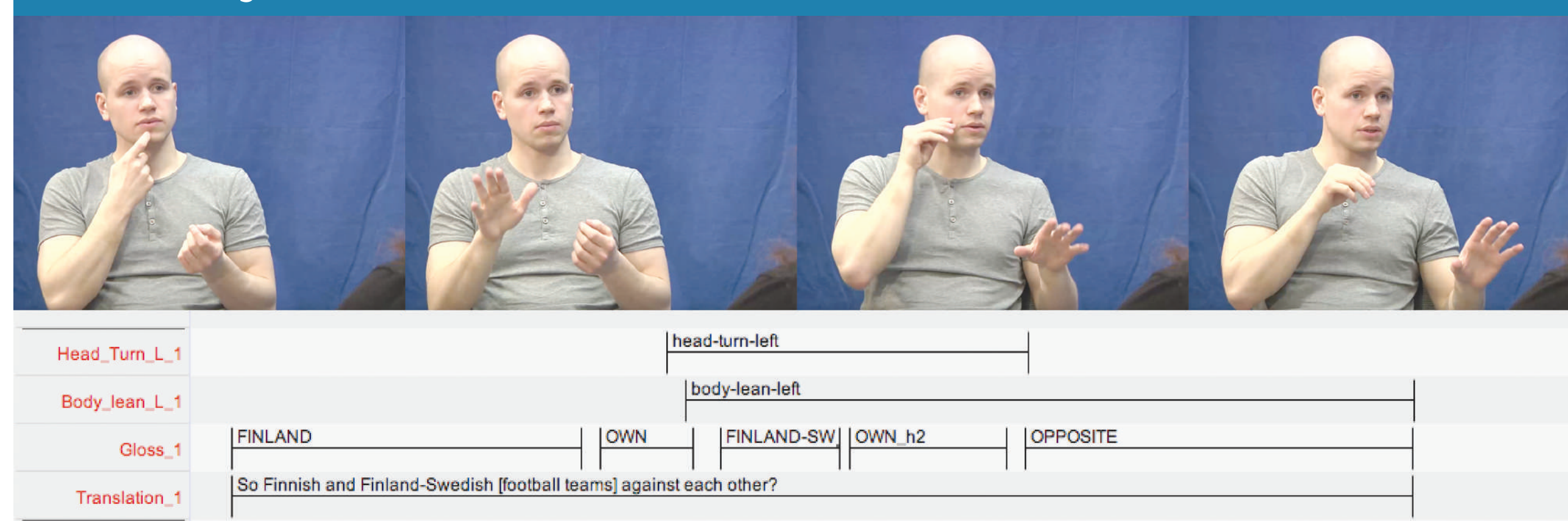


Fig. 4. An example of contrastive sideways movements of the head and body that indicate a referent (cf. Wilbur & Patschke 1998).

iv. Indicating discourse structure

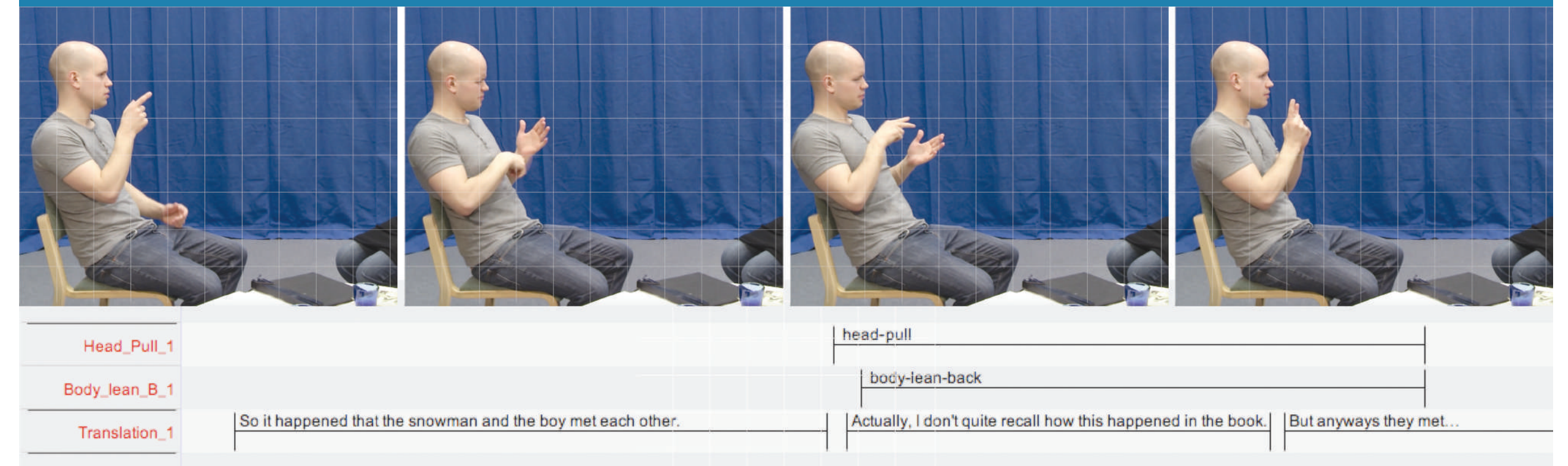


Fig. 5. An example of a backward movement of the head and body that indicates discourse structure by parsing together a stretch of signing (cf. e.g. Sandler 2012).

v. Indicating reactions

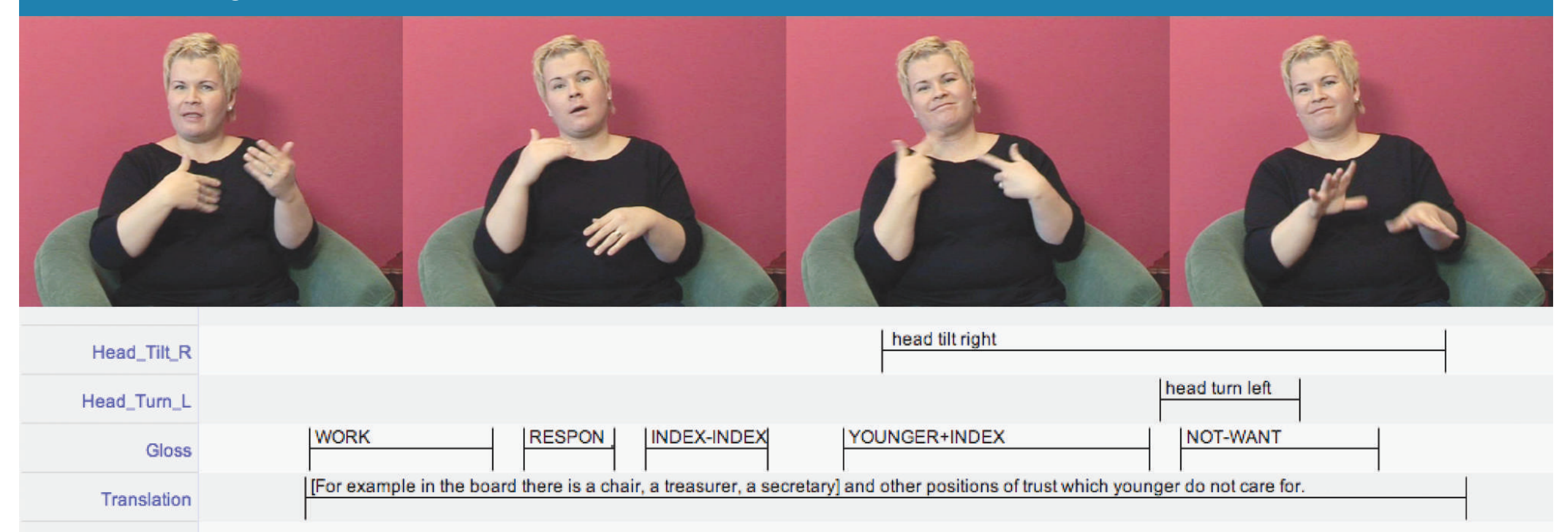


Fig. 6. An example of head and body movements indicating an exclusive (Wilbur & Patschke 1999; van der Kooij et al. 2006) reaction to something; in this case, a referent's reaction is enacted by the signer.

vi. Conventional types for tokens

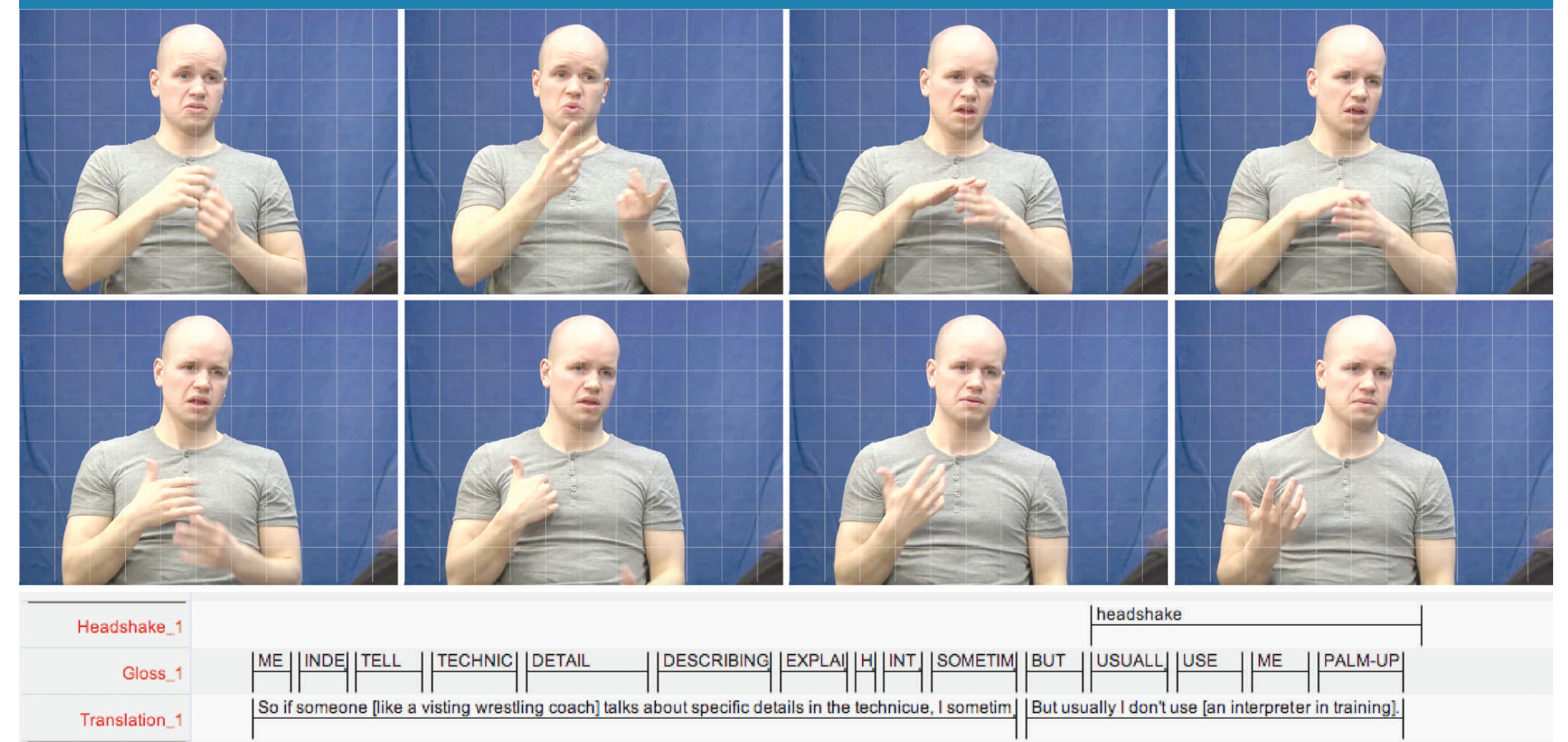


Fig. 7. An example of a more conventional head movement, a headshake, that changes the meaning of a sentence from affirmative to negative together with the facial expression.

3. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

- **Indexical strategies are central** in all head and body movements
- **Iconicity** is present as well: may depict referents but this is mostly enactment
- **Symbolicity is not as prominent**: rarely form types for tokens, rely more on association of analogies and spatio-temporal proximity → but still they are significant

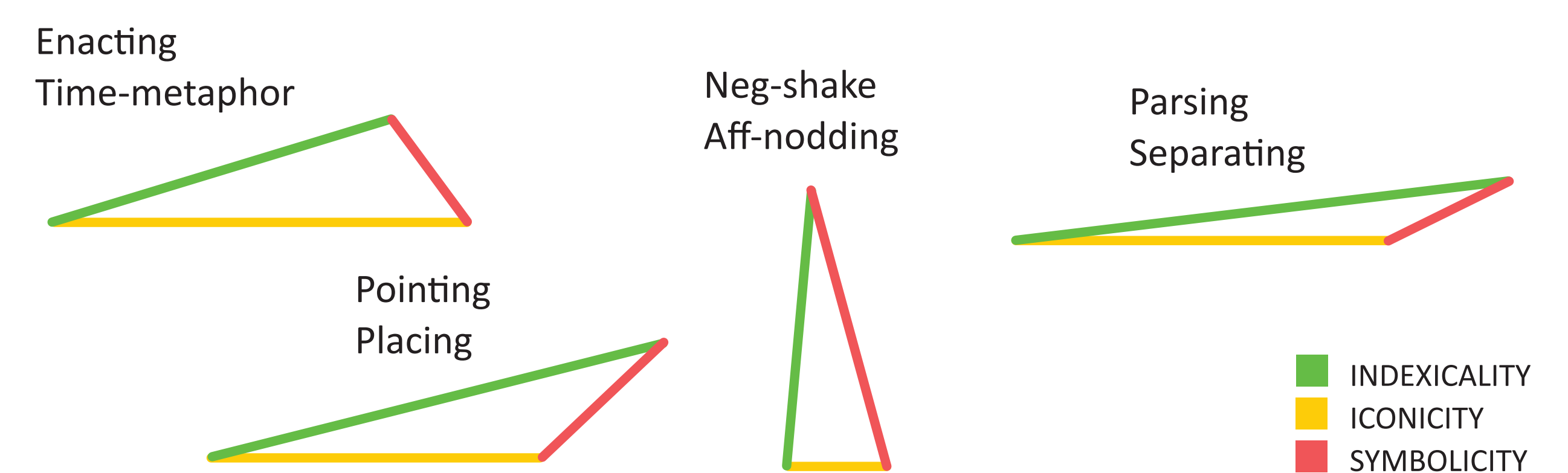


Fig 8. Different proportions of semiotic strategies in head movements (visualization from Capirci 2018).

- **Contextual association** is important: emphasize, complement or connect to other co-occurring signals in composite utterances (Enfield 2009)
- **Differ from signals of the face and hands** in their semiotic repertoire
 - **Modal affordances**: possibilities and restrictions of the human body for conveying meaning (e.g. Wagner et al. 2014), e.g. capacity to imitate visible features in the world
- Need for a theory of language that **embraces less symbolic, unconventional elements** instead of pushing them to the periphery

BIBLIOGRAPHY: CAPIRCI, O. (2018). Visible bodily action in the emergence and development of speakers' and signers' languaging. A paper presented at the ISGS 8 conference, July 4–8, 2018. – ENFIELD, N. J. (2009). *The Anatomy of Meaning*. Cambridge: CUP. – FERRARA, L. & HODGE, G. (2018). Language as description, indication, and depiction. *Frontiers of Psychology* 9(716). – HERRMANN, A. & PENDZICH, N.-K. (2014). Nonmanual gestures in sign languages. In C. Müller et al. (eds.) *Body – Language – Communication. An international handbook on multi-modality in human interaction*, 2149–2163. Berlin: De Gruyter. – KOCKELMAN, P. (2005). The semiotic stance. *Semiotica* 157(1), 233–304. – PEIRCE, C. S. (1903). *Nomenclature and Divisions of Triadic Relations, as Far as They Are Determined*. *The Essential Peirce*, vol. 2. Peirce edition Project (eds. 1998), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 289–299. – PFAU, R. & QUER, J. (2010). Nonmanuals: their grammatical and prosodic roles. In D. Brentari (ed.), *Sign languages: A Cambridge language survey*. Cambridge: CUP, 381–402. – SANDLER, W. (2012). Visual prosody. In R. Pfau et al. (eds.) *Sign language: An international handbook*, 55–76. Berlin: De Gruyter. – VAN DER KOOIJ, E., CRASBORN, O. & EMMERIK, W. (2006). Explaining prosodic body leans in Sign Language of the Netherlands: Pragmatics required. *Journal of Pragmatics* 38, 1598–1614. – WAGNER, P., MALISZ, Z. & KOPP, S. (2014). Gesture and speech in interaction: An overview. *Speech Communication* 57, 209–232. – WILBUR, R. B. (2000). Phonological and prosodic layering of nonmanuals in American Sign Language. In K. Emmorey & H. Lane (eds.), *The signs of language revisited*, 215–244. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum. – WILBUR, R. B. & PATSCHKE, C. (1998). Body leans and the marking of contrast in American Sign Language. *Journal of Pragmatics* 30(3), 275–303.