# Pointing Gestures and Personal References in
# Seychelles Sign Language (SSL) & Creole Seychellois (CS)

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Sign Language emerge from natural gestures and cultural gestuality used in the surrounding hearing community ( Meir & al, 2012). Seychellois speakers and signers widely use pointing gesture in association with personal referents.

**At what level is SSL influenced by cultural gestuality of CS's speakers ?**

**How are pointing gestures integrated in SSL : how do they change, or specialize ?**

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## Gesture and Speech in Creole Seychellois (CS)

Seychelles is an archipelago country in the Indian Ocean. 95000 inhabitants, a multilingual and multicultural society. Creole Seychellois is the native language of 90% of the population, and the everyday interaction's language.

Gesture assume a high status in everyday interactions. Silent communication is used with non-Creole speakers. Creole speakers gesture a lot. Interactional gestures without any counterpart in speech are common in use. But above all, speakers produce a lot of large co-speech gestures in alignment with personal and spatial referents in speech. Gesture and speech complement each-other, forming a co-expressive utterance (Kendon 2000).

In particular, **CS reference marking involves not only speech, but also gesture and cultural factors**. (Brueck 2016: 212). CS's structure is characterised by a reduced pronoun and article system , compensated by pragmatic constructions with repetition or dislocation, and the simultaneous addition of co-speech gestures.

Brueck's corpus shows that 79% of these co-speech gestures are referential gestures ; among them 42% are iconic gestures and 58 % pointing gestures. At a semantic level, they correspond to direct pointings ( to the person refered to in speech), metonymic pointings ( to an existing place in relation with the person) or metaphorical pointings (to an abstract place in gesture space).

## Seychelles Sign Language (SSL)

Deaf people live in the three main islands. Interactions make that they share a sign language, SSL, which can be categorised as **a 'very-small-community sign language'.** The lexicon shows a local variability, but also certain influence of other SL, like French, Maurician or American Sign language. Pointing gestures are very frequently produced by signers, as interactional gesture but essentially as part of SSL.

Same process of lexicalization and grammaticalization of pointing gestures than in other SL (DeVos 2015, Fenlon 2019) have been observed, with specificities in form and function for SSL in relation with CS structural, cultural and gestural specificities.

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## DEM) + N + DEM + Pronoun : a frequent construction for new personal references in CS which favors pointing gestures

Ex :    Sa vwazen   la   I pou koupe

DEM NEIGHBOUR DEM  PAR TNS  CUT

*My neighbour will cut*

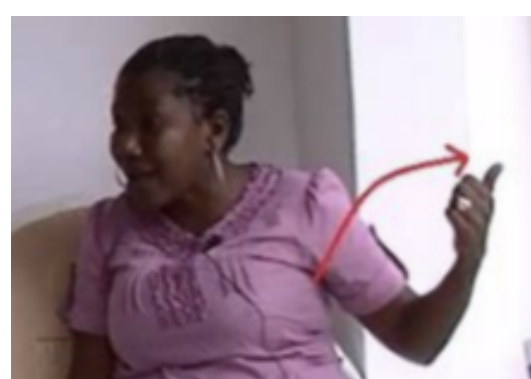(__ = place of the pointing gesture here a metaphorical pointing)



The personal referent often occurs simultaneously with a pointing gesture. Redundant added grammatical particles in CS seem to favor the high frequency of points with new personal referents (Brueck 2016).

## Association of personal and spatial references = a creole cultural specificity

Spatial and person references are often associated. Thus, speakers often add spatial information on the existing place where the person lives, with words or/and in gesture.

Preferential use of pointing gestures toward an existing location is cultural, common for communities who live in a very small area (Haviland 1993 or DeVos 2015)

ex Mon konn msye D. la borlanmer

1SG KNOW MR D DEM BEACH

*I know Mr D. there at the beach*

(__ = metonymic pointing toward Mr D's home )



I pou call son bann ser

3SG TNS CALL POSS PL SISTER

*He will call his sisters*

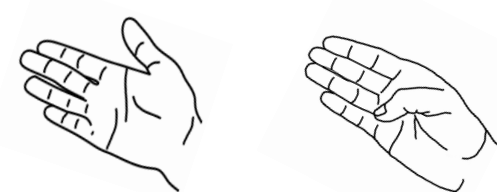(___ = double metomymic pointing toward the two locations where her sisters live)



. *"This pointing, which metonymically combines spatial and person reference, has been observed quite frequently (..) and can be regarded as a 'typical' KS gesture."*

(Brueck 2016:165)

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## Specialized forms of pointings in SSL

Signers and speakers use a same set of 5 handshapes, but differently.

only 10% in CS, but for more than 80% in SSL, SSL pointing signs are indexical pointings. Conventionalized and grammaticalized.

a variant of index, for back or side-back direct pointings,

very usual hand-shapes for speakers ( 63%), conventionalized in SSL as lexical items for PATH,

specific in CS for reference to speaker him/herself integrated in the SSL lexicon as individual self-reference.
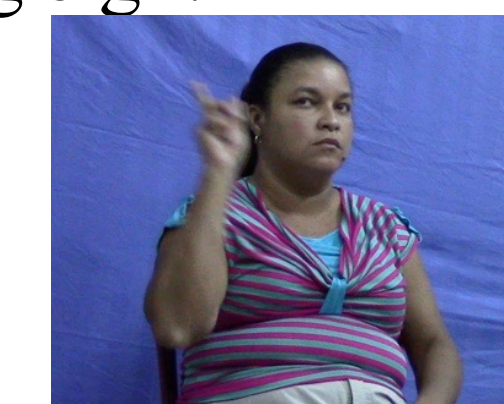
## N+ pt-IX : a frequent construction in SSL, coming from CS ?

Pointing gesture usually don't co-occur with personal or spatial referents, because of the gestual modality. New personal referents in SSL are followed by an index pointing (noted PT-IX), completely integrated in the gestural sequence as pointing sign.

  

MISS PT-IX  SMALL BOY POSSESS   ME REMEMBER FRIEND PT-IX      INDIAN PT-IX TIP

*She has a boy*          *I remember a friend*         *The indian man types*

Point toward the present person   the existing place he lived      an abstract place

The high frequency of this construction for new referents is similar to CS's multimodal construction and tendency to combine a personal and a spatial reference anchored in the surrounding environment.

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## Indexical pointing signs as personal and spatial anaphoric markers in SSL

Pointing signs can occur isolated, as deitic or anaphoric personal reference markers as for other Signed Languages. That is never the case for anaphoric pointing gestures in CS.

They mostly occur in a reduced form in SSL, assuming a function either of full pronoun, or clitic index. Large pointing generally signal an intend of emphasize a reference.
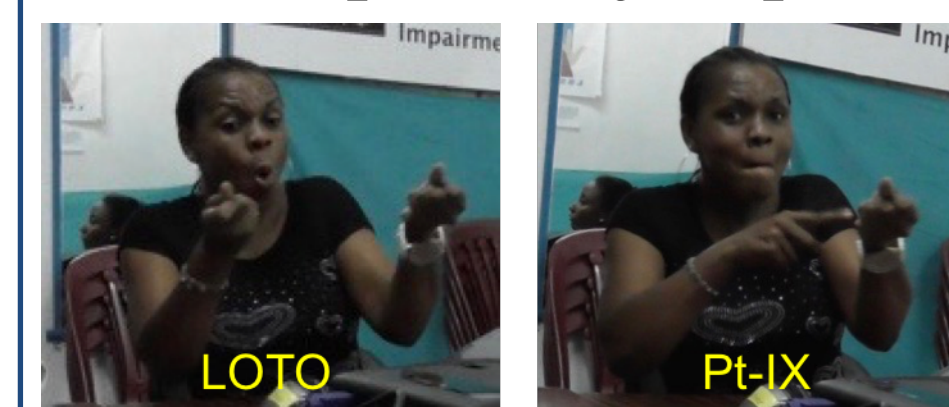
SSL also combine personal and spatial references as subject markers with very reduced pointing signs



MONDAY, THUESDAY, … FRIDAY  WORK  PT-IX(THERE) PT-IX(ME)  WORK

*I work everyday*

## A specific pointing gesture for sign languages ?

In addition to the pointing gestures directed toward a real or an abstract location, signers point also toward their hand. The reference is not associated with an abstract location, but with the hand-shape who just produced the referential sign.

 

CAR PT-IX YOU PT-IX YOU ?

*Have you got a car ?*

This construction is also attested in French Sign Language, and probably in other SL

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## Conclusion : a specialization of features already presents in creole speaker's gestuality

Cultural influence of speakers gestuality, itself influenced by language's structure and social behaviors.

- Common frequent association of a personal reference and a pointing gesture for new referents.
- Common frequent association of personal and spatial references
- Preferential use of pointing gestures toward existing locations

Pointing gestures differ for speakers and signers, when they are part of SSL. But conventionalization, reduction and syntactic integration systematize a process of spatial construction which is already present in gestuality.

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Sources and illustrations
SSL corpus, 2007-2017,
Alain Gebert et Annie Risler,
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Mélanie Brueck 2016 PhD dissertation

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