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DISMANTLING THE NOTION OF CONSTRUCTED ACTION AS A METALINGUISTIC TOOL:
Efficient information encoding through direct representation

TISLR13
DComm Deictic Communication
National Research Council of Italy
LaCAM
Radboud University Nijmegen

background

What are language properties?

✓ categorical, conventional, combinatorial, & linear
SAYING

✗ iconic, gradient, synthetic
SHOWING

Goldin-Meadow & Brentari, 2017, Clark, 2016; Cuxac, 1999; Dingemanse, 2018; Dudis, 2007; Johnston, 2013; Ferrara & Halvorsen, 2017

Encoding strategies in LIS

Imagistic & diagrammatic

Lexical signs | Depicting constructions | Constructed Action (CA)

Diagrammatic properties of CA

What is the role of CA?

CA has been considered gestural rather than linguistic property of SLs used for evaluative purposes.

Studied in narrative contexts (viewed as enhancement of the narration)

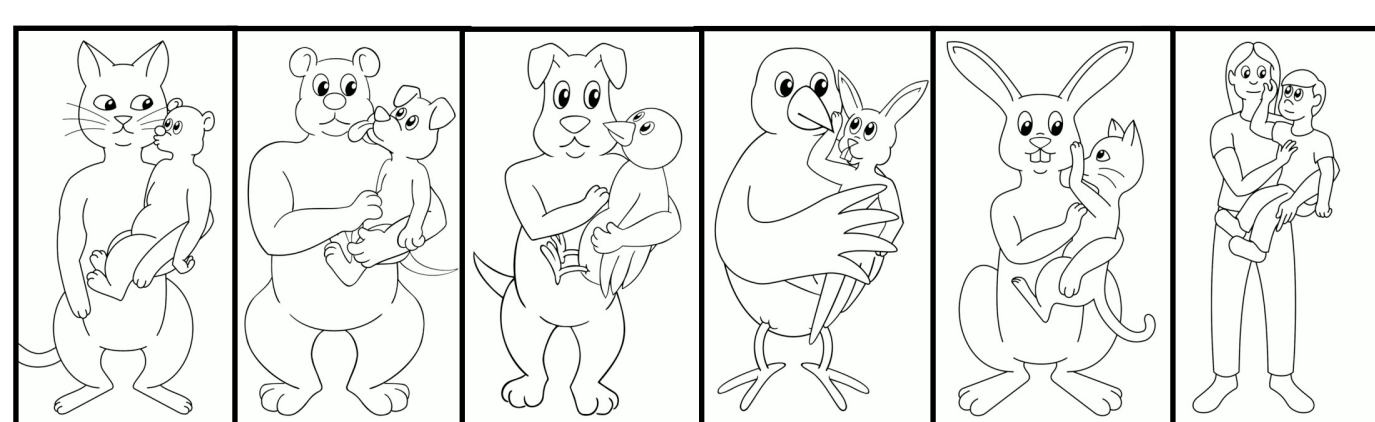Engberg-Pedersen, 1999; Mather; Winston, 1998; Hodge & Ferrara, 2014; Rogers, 2012

Can CA serve referential function?

Aim: controlled assessment of whether LIS signers use CA not simply as a metalinguistic tool, but instead, whether its properties are taken advantage of for referential purposes for efficient communication in informative task

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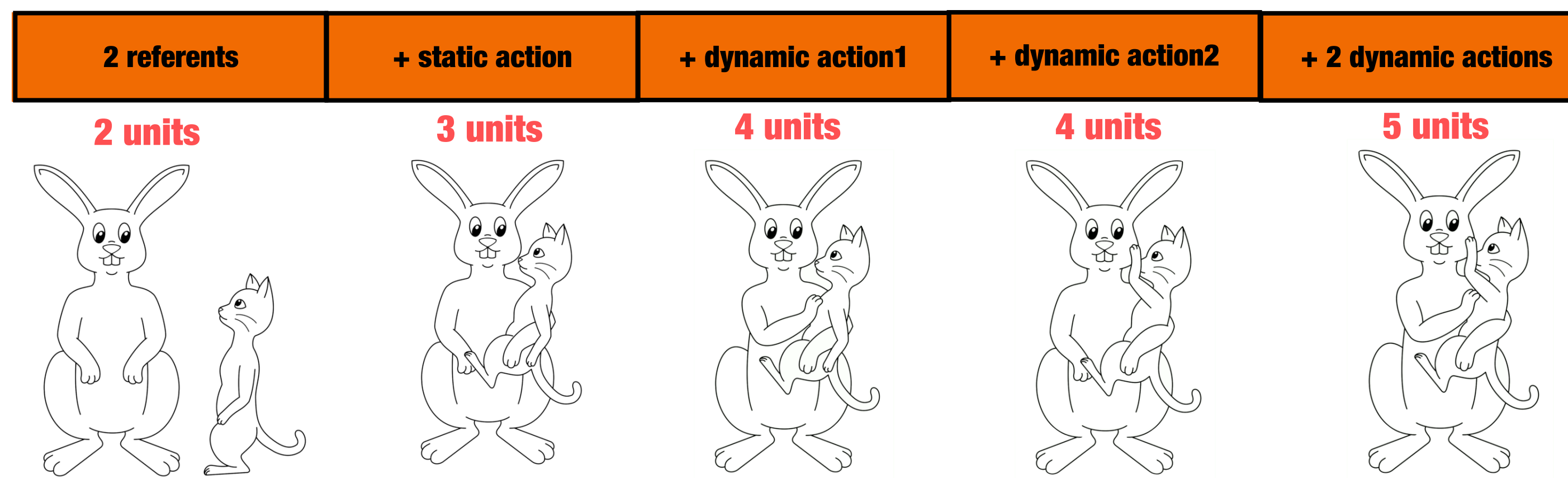
method

- **Material**

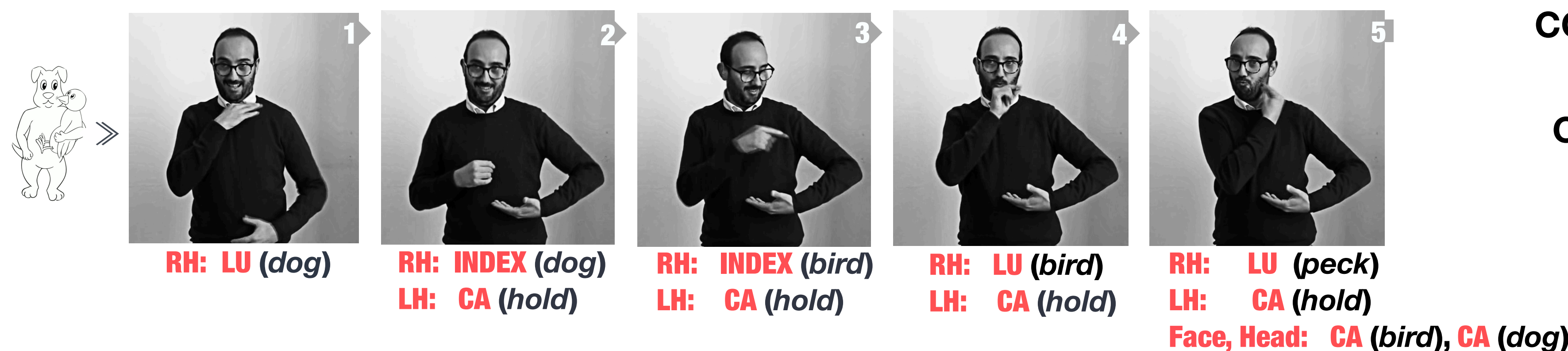**30 total stimuli = 6 sets x**
5 information density levels

- **Task** - Director/matcher task. Video-recorded and annotated in ELAN

- **Participants** - 23 deaf adults (F=12, age range 18-57), 19 native signers, 3 early signers (AoA 5-8)
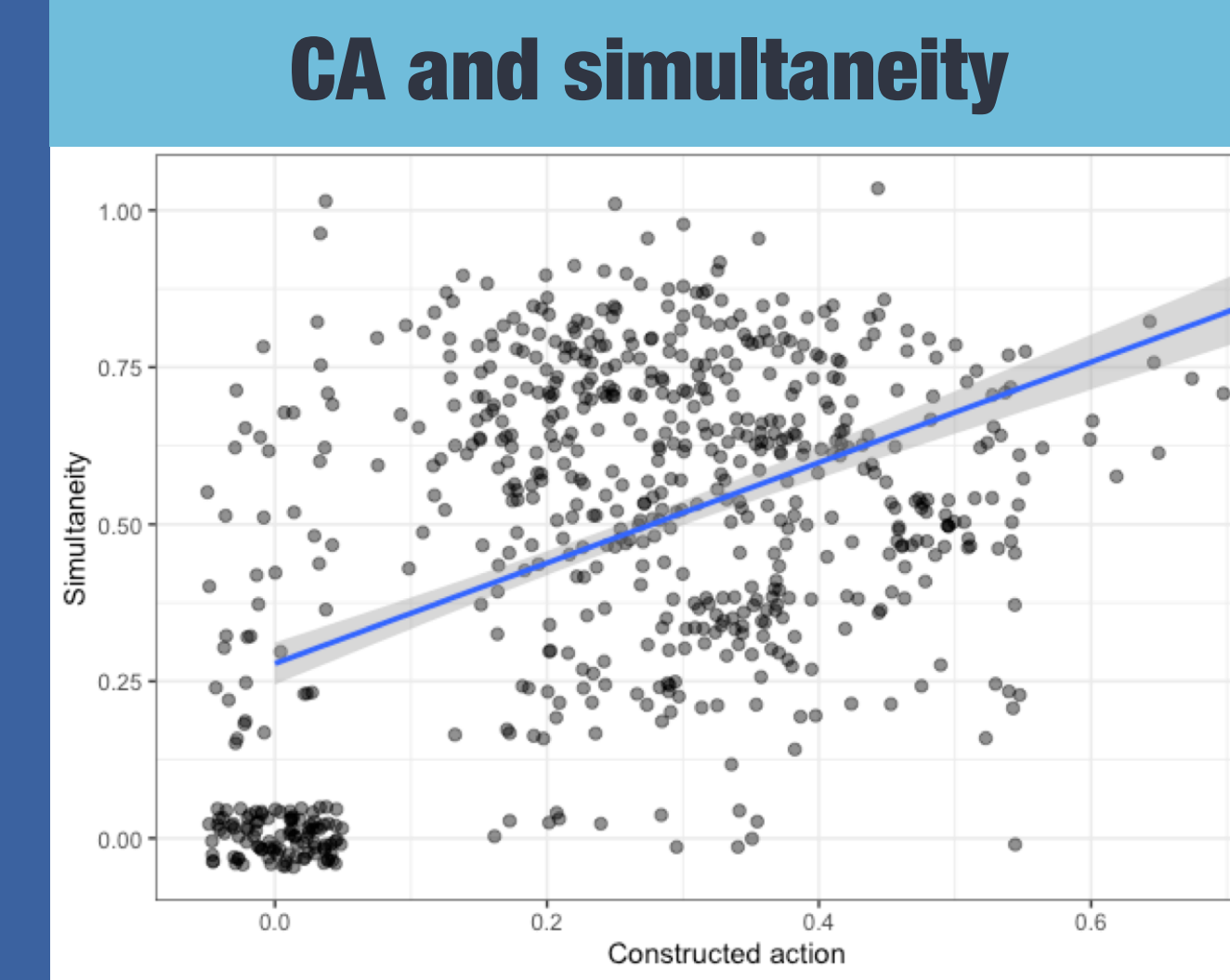
•Design

2 referents	+ static action	+ dynamic action1	+ dynamic action2	+ 2 dynamic actions
2 units	3 units	4 units	4 units	5 units

•Coding

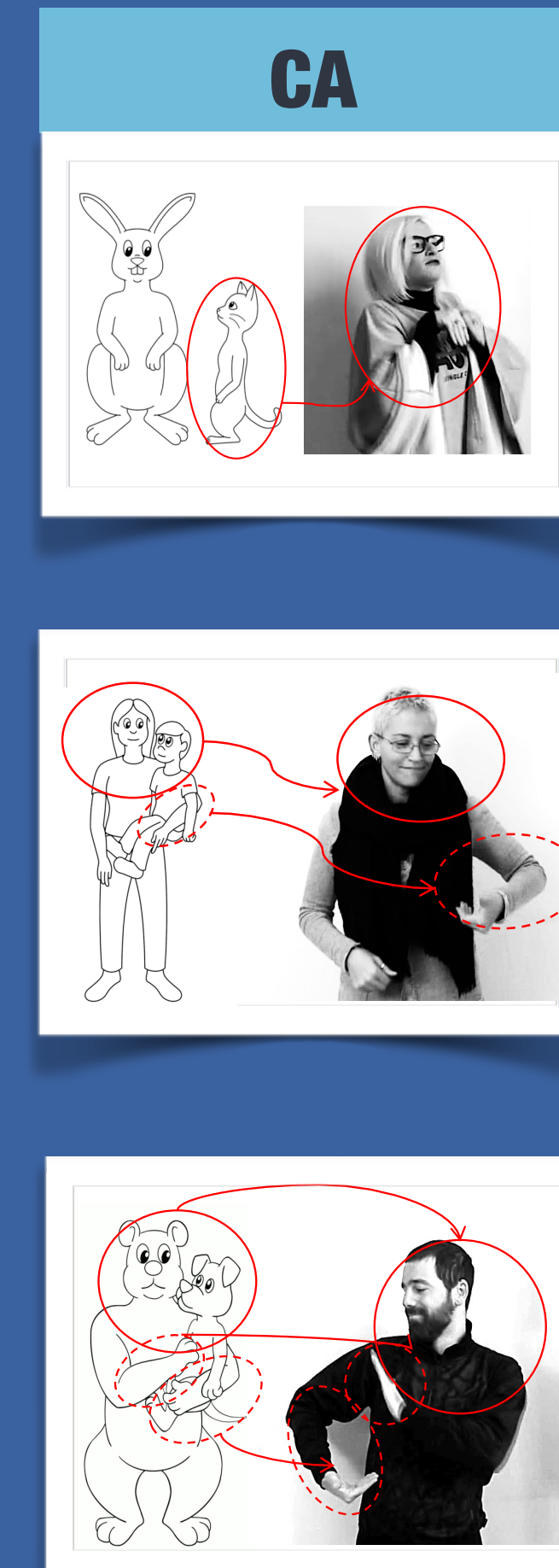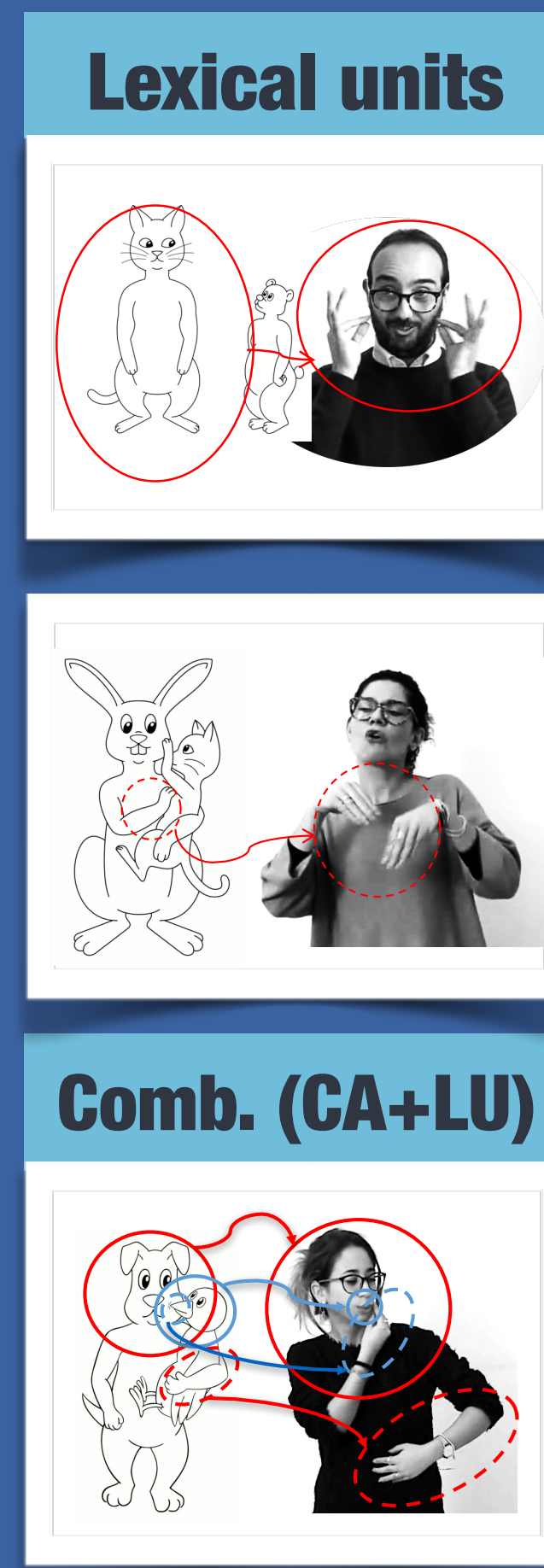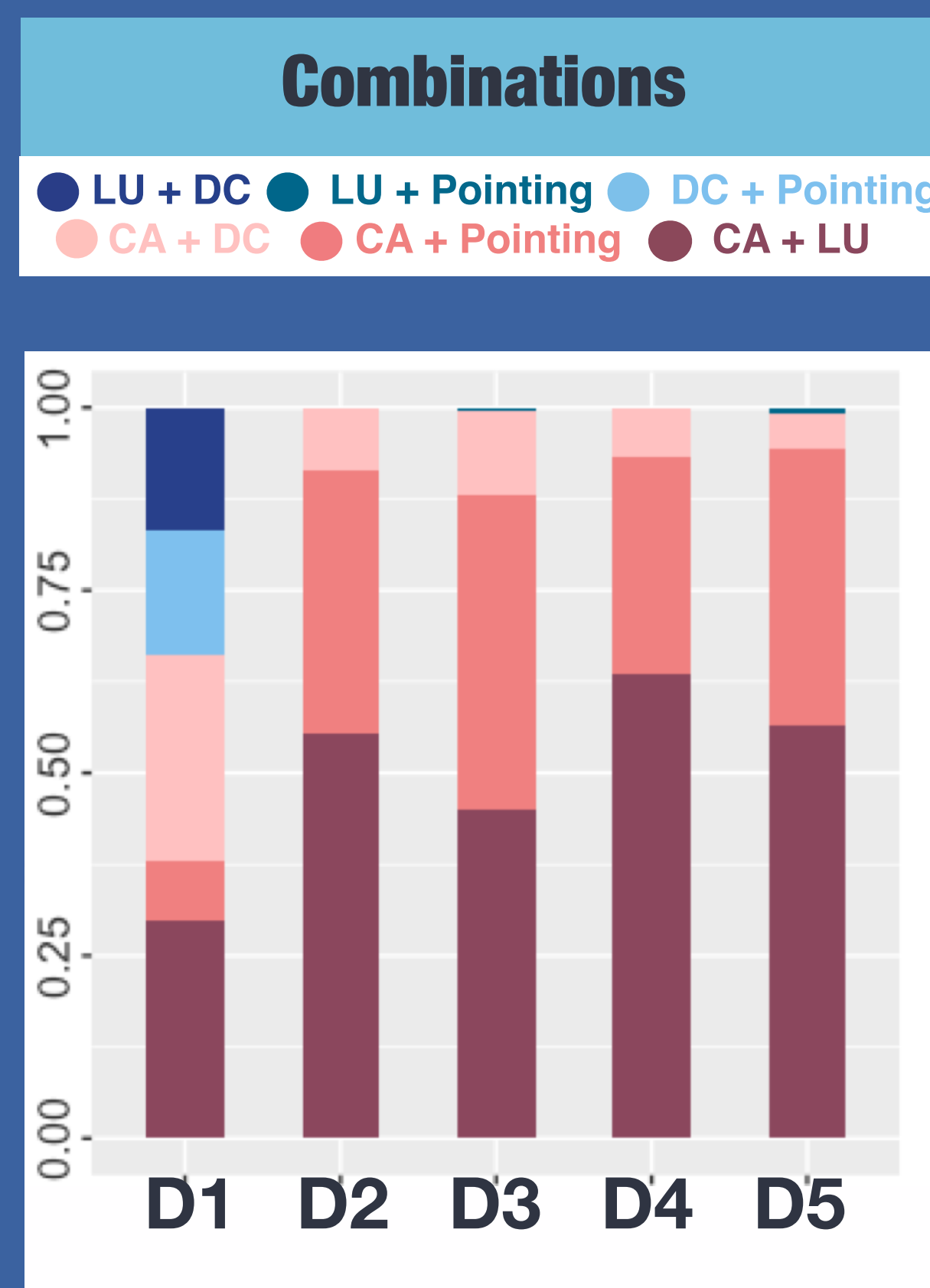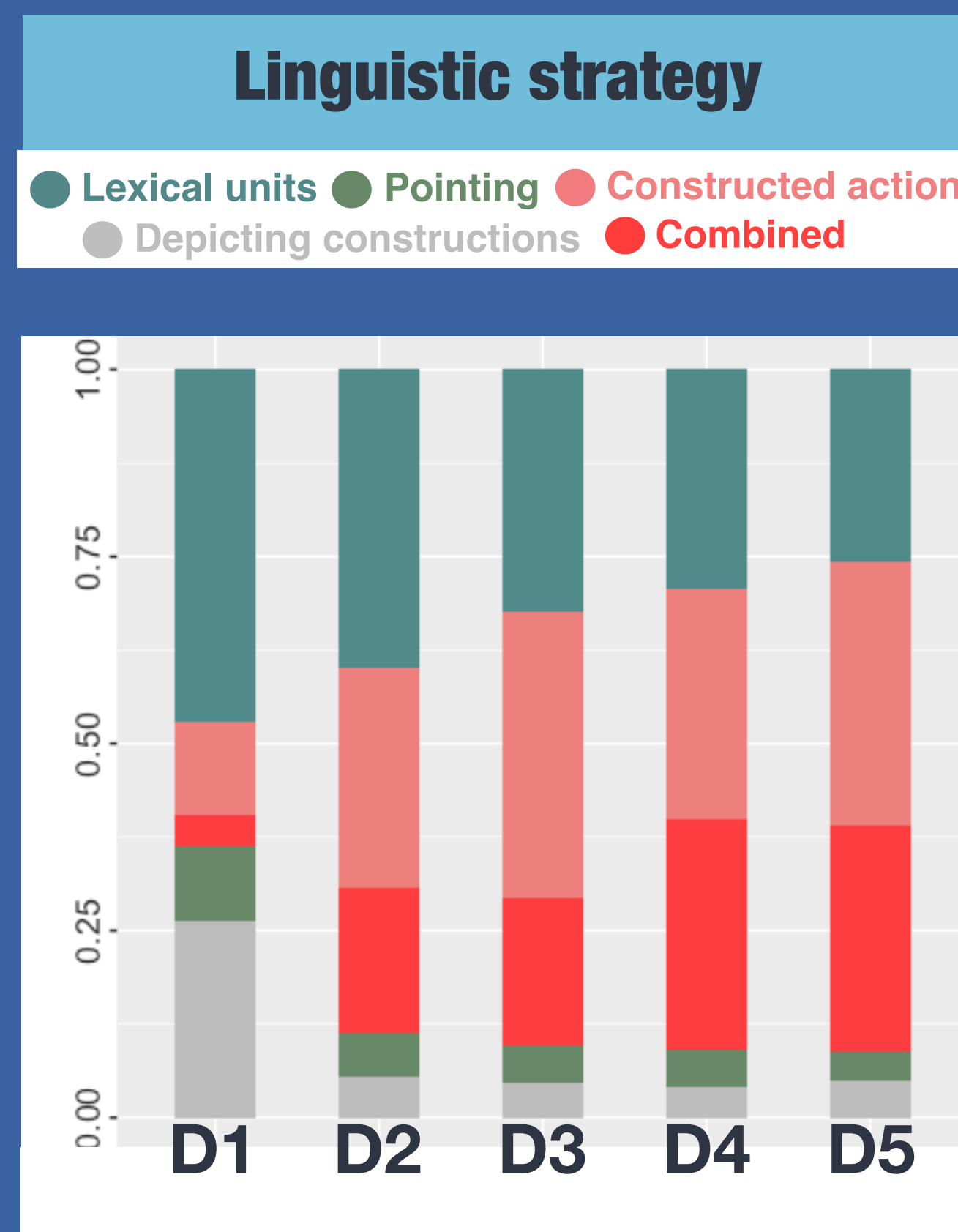| 1	2	3	4	5
RH: LU (dog)	RH: INDEX (dog) LH: CA (hold)	RH: INDEX (bird) LH: CA (hold)	RH: LU (bird) LH: CA (hold)	RH: LU (peck) LH: CA (hold) Face, Head: CA (bird), CA (dog)

•Annotation

movement segments (MS)

new hand stroke (or preparation) delimits the end of the previous and start of the new segment

linguistic strategy

LEXICAL UNIT (LU)
CONSTRUCTED ACTION (CA)
DEPICTING CONSTRUCTION UNIT (DC)
POINTING (INDEX)
COMBINED (e.g., LU+CA)

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results

Linguistic strategy

● Lexical units ● Pointing ● Constructed action ● Depicting constructions ● Combined

Prop: specific strategy in each MS vs. Total MS

D1 D2 D3 D4 D5

Combinations

● LU + DC ● LU + Pointing ● DC + Pointing ● CA + DC ● CA + Pointing ● CA + LU

D1 D2 D3 D4 D5

Lexical units

CA

Comb. (CA+LU)

CA and simultaneity

CA is significantly correlated with simultaneous encoding of information (r= 0.47, p <.0001). Correlation increases to very strong when combinations with CA are added (r= 0.89, p <.0001).

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conclusions

Although the task of participants was purely informative, they nevertheless increased the use of CA alone or in combination with another strategy

USE OF CONSTRUCTED ACTION DUE ITS EFFICIENCY AFFORDED BY IMAGISTIC AND DIAGRAMMATIC ICONICITY

More direct representation of the event - multiple elements that are perceived holistically (e.g., agent and action) can be encoded in a single representation

DEPICTION AS ADVANTAGE OF LANGUAGE RATHER THAN PROOF OF ITS ABSENCE

Clark, H. H. (2016). Depicting as a method of communication. *Psychological review, 123*(3), 324.;Cuxac, C. (1999, March). French sign language: proposition of a structural explanation by iconicity. In *International Gesture Workshop* (pp. 165-184). Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg; Dingemanse, M. (2018). Redrawing the margins of language: Lessons from research on ideophones. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics, 3*(1).;Dudis, P. (2007). Types of Depiction in ASL. *Manuscript, Gallaudet University*.;Duncan, S. (2005). Gesture in signing: A case study from Taiwan Sign Language. *LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS-TAIPEI-, 6*(2), 279;Engberg-Pedersen, E. (1999). Space and time. *Cognitive semantics: Meaning and cognition*, 131-152.;Ferrara, L., & Halvorsen, R. P. (2017). Depicting and describing meanings with iconic signs in Norwegian Sign Language. *Gesture, 16*(3), 371-395.;Goldin-Meadow, S., & Brentari, D. (2017). Gesture, sign, and language: The coming of age of sign language and gesture studies. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 40*.;Hodge, G. & Ferrara, L. (2014). Showing the story: Enactment as performance in Auslan narratives.;Johnston, T. (2013). Formational and functional characteristics of pointing signs in a corpus of Auslan (Australian sign language): are the data sufficient to posit a grammatical class of 'pronouns' in Auslan?. *Corpus Linguistics and Linguistic Theory, 9*(1), 109-159.;Johnston, T., & Schembri, A. C. (1999). On defining lexeme in a signed language. *Sign language & linguistics, 2*(2), 115-185.;Klima, E. S., & Bellugi, U. (1979). *The signs of language*. Harvard University Press.;Mather, S., & Winston, E. A. (1998). Spatial Mapping and Involvement. Pinky extension and eye gaze: Language use in Deaf communities, 4, 183.;Quinto-Pozos, D., & Mehta, S. (2010). Register variation in mimetic gestural complements to signed language. *Journal of Pragmatics, 42*(3), 557-584.;Rogers, K. L. (2012). American Sign Language Verb Categories in Constructed Action.