

# THE ROLE OF ATTENTIONAL FOCUS IN PERSPECTIVE ENCODING IN ITALIAN SIGN LANGUAGE

## How do people encode transitive actions?

## Signed languages

## Spoken languages

Prototypical: body indexes single referent

Conceptually more complex: body indexed two referents simultaneously

Choice between two voices to focalise specific referent of a transitive event.

### Agent's



### Patient's



### ACTIVE voice

A dog caresses the boy

### PASSIVE voice

A boy is being caressed by a dog

In BSL complex transitive verbs (AB verbs), verbs that affect specific body part: **obligatory encoding of both perspectives**

Focal attention of the producer can be guided by **inherent saliency** (e.g., comparative size); **discourse saliency** (e.g., agentivity status)

Morgan, 2002

Tomlin, Forrest, Pu, & Kim 1997; Tomlin, 1995, 1997

background



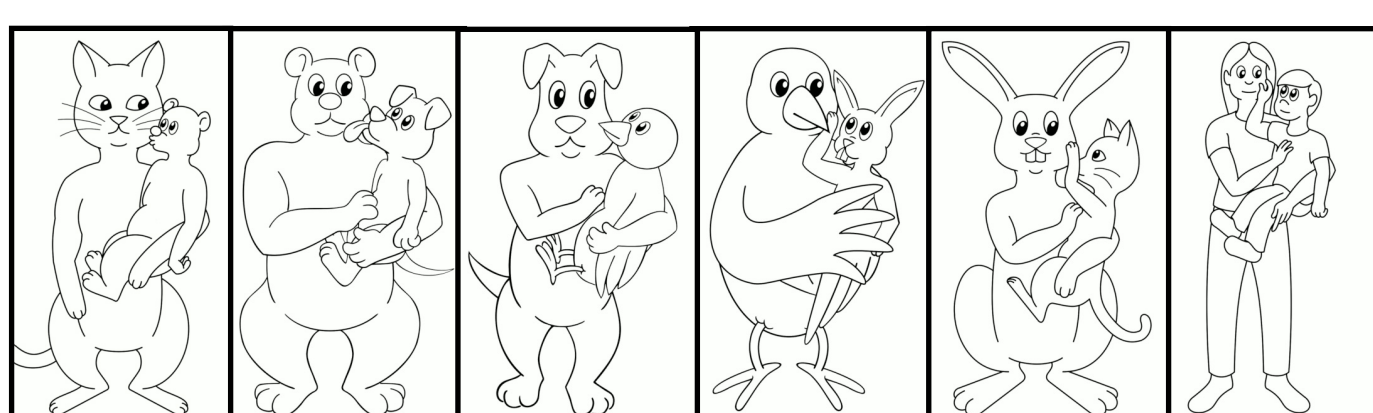
## Is there obligatory encoding of both perspectives for transitive actions in Italian Sign Language (LIS)? If not, what drives focal attention of the signer?

method

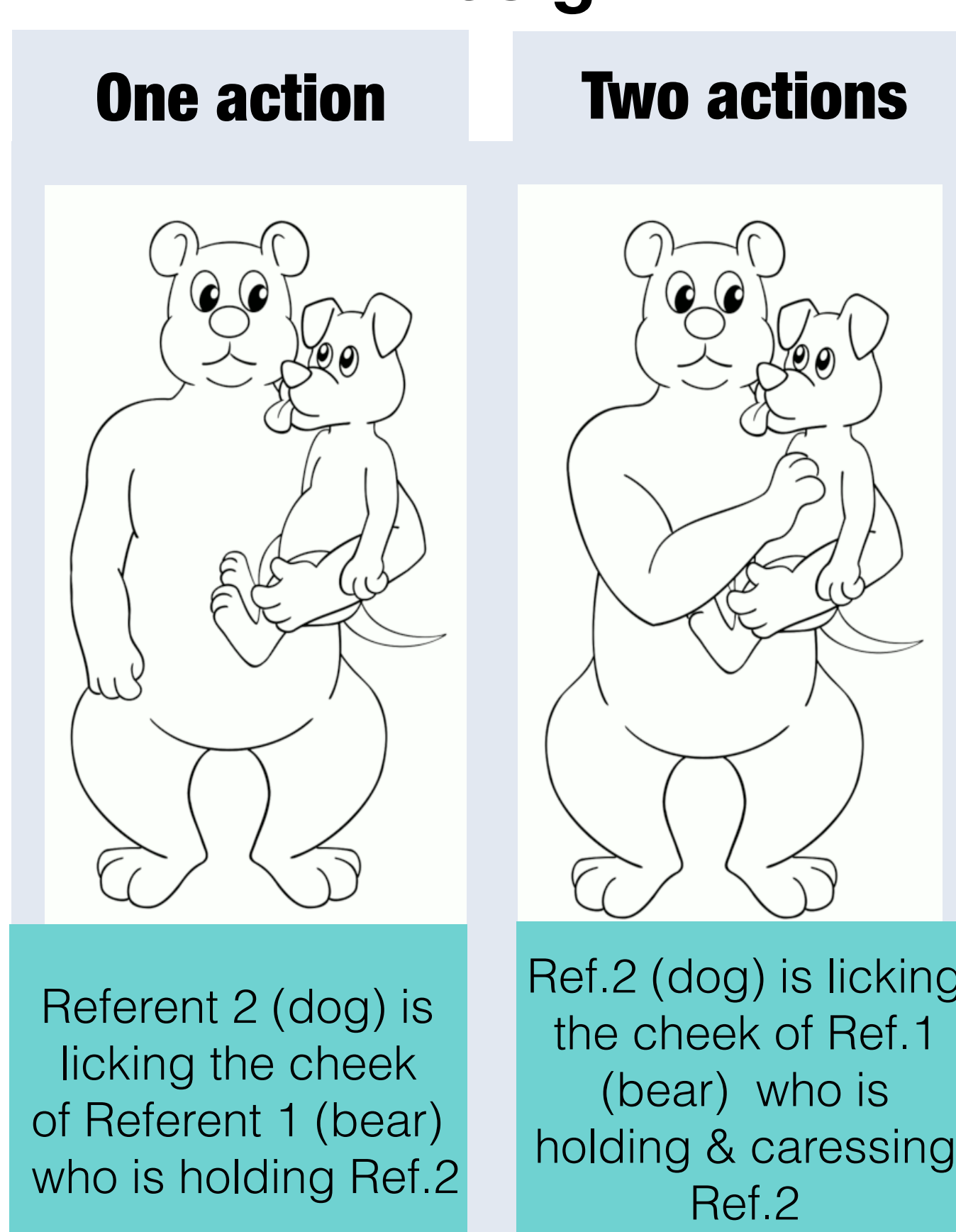
• **Task** Director/matcher task. Video-recorded and annotated in ELAN

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

• **Material** - 12 GIFs in total



### •Design



### •Coding

From which perspective the action of Ref.2 is encoded?

Agent's

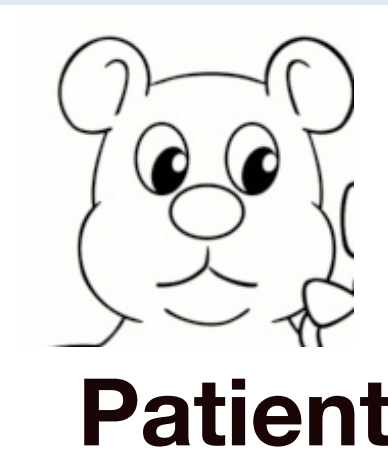
Patient's

Agent's + Patient's

276 data points

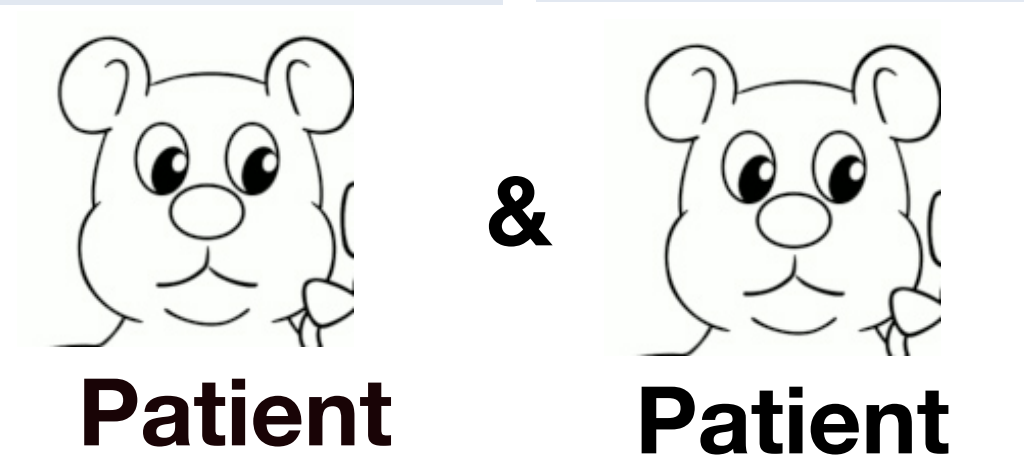
### •Predictions

#### One action



Patient

#### Two actions



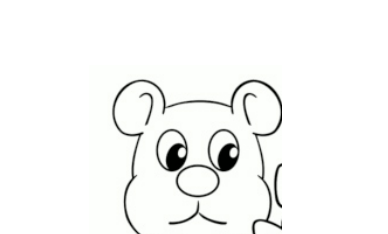
Patient



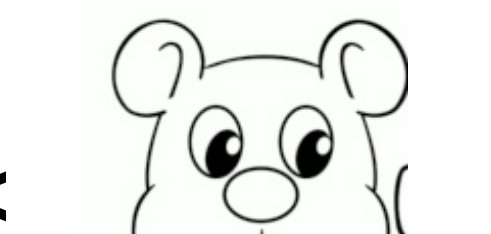
Agent



Agent + Patient



More patient in Two actions than in One action



VISUAL SALIENCE

AGENTIVE SALIENCE

GLOBAL (VISUAL + AGENTIVE) SALIENCE

results

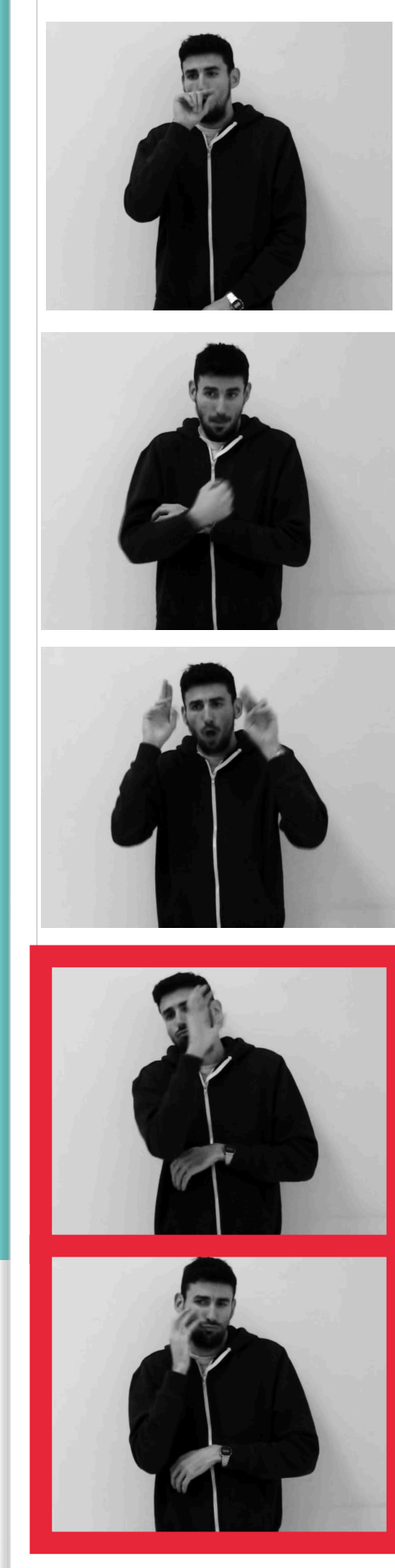
### Are both perspectives obligatory in LIS?



### AGENT



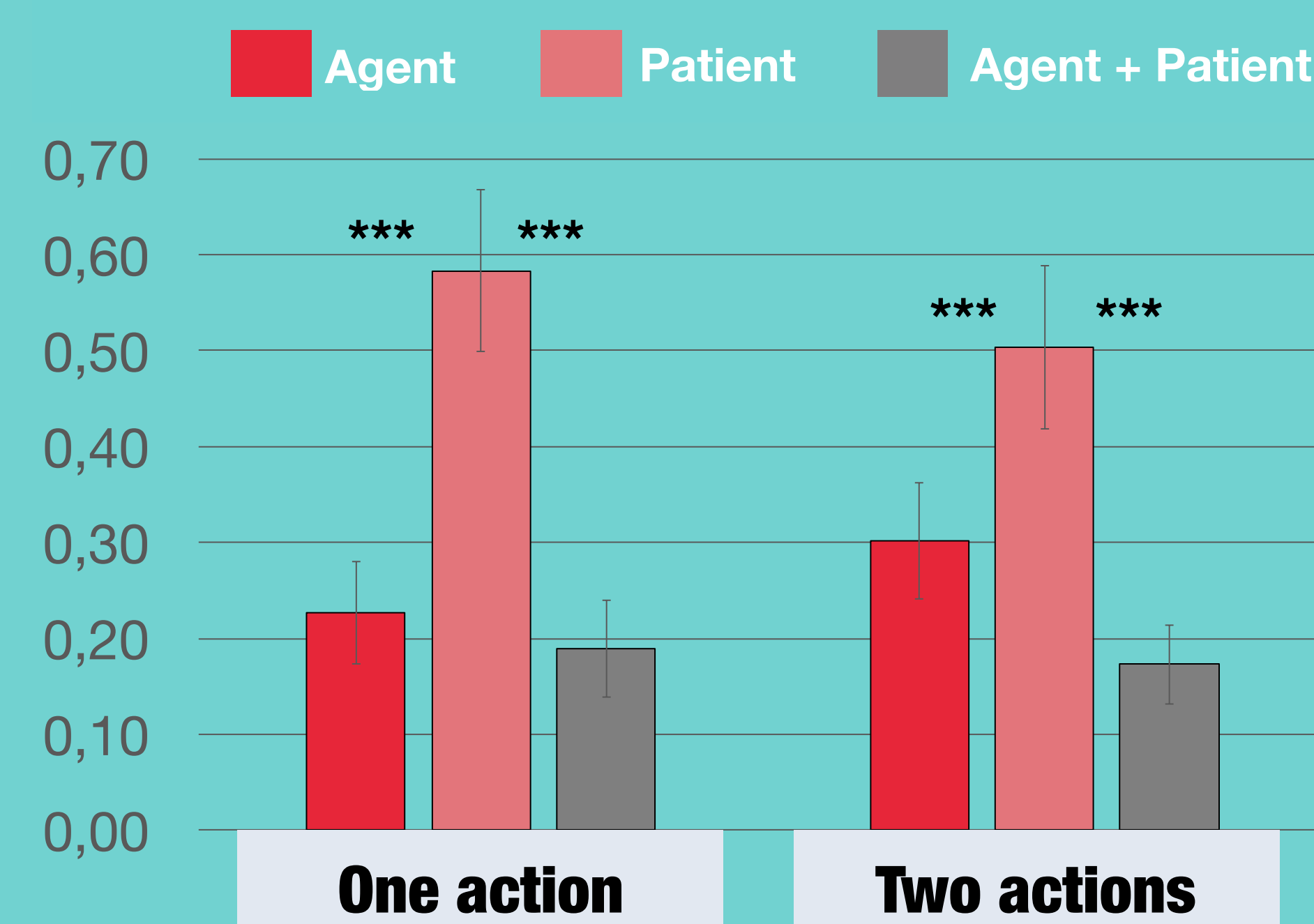
### AGENT + PATIENT



### PATIENT



### What drives focal attention of the signer?



conclusions

In LIS complex transitive verbs can be encoded from- agent and/or patient perspectives. **Encoding of both perspectives is not obligatory**

**PERSPECTIVE ENCODING SERVES COMPARABLE FUNCTION AS VOICE IN SPOKEN LANGUAGES**

**Perspective encoding is driven by visual saliency of the referent, even though it might be more conceptually demanding strategy (patient's perspective)**

Bybee, J. L. (1985). Diagrammatic iconicity in stem-inflection relations. *Iconicity in syntax*, 11-48.; Christianson, K., & Ferreira, F. (2005). Conceptual accessibility and sentence production in a free word order language (Ojibwa). *Cognition*, 98(2), 105-135.; Engberg-Pedersen, E. (2015). Perspective in signed discourse: the privileged status of the signer's locus and gaze. *Open Linguistics*, 1(1); Isenhardt, J. O. (1990). The linguistics of American sign language. *McFarland*; Janzen, T., O'Dea, B., & Shaffer, B. (2001). The construal of events: passives in American Sign Language. *Sign language studies*, 281-310.; Liddell, S. K. (2003). *Grammar, gesture, and meaning in American Sign Language*. Cambridge University Press.; Morgan, G., Herman, R., & Woll, B. (2002). The development of complex verb constructions in British Sign Language. *Journal of child language*, 29(3), 655-675.; Sridhar, K. K. (1988). Language maintenance and language shift among Asian-Indians: Kannadigas in the New York area. *International journal of the sociology of language*, 1988(69), 73-88.; Stokoe, W., Casterline, D., & Croneberg, C. (1965). *A dictionary of ASL on linguistic principles*; Tomlin, R. S. (1995). Focal attention, voice, and word order. In P. Downing & M. Noonan (Eds.), *Word Order in Discourse* (pp. 517-552). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.; Tomlin, R. S. (1997). Mapping conceptual representations into linguistic representations: The role of attention in grammar. *Language and conceptualization*, 162-189; Tomlin, R. S., Forrest, L., Pu, M. M., & Kim, M. H. (1997). Knowledge integration and information management in discourse. *Discourse: a multidisciplinary introduction*. London: Sage.; Van Nice, K. Y., & Dietrich, R. (2003). Task sensitivity of animacy effects: Evidence from German picture descriptions. *Linguistics*, 41(5); ISSU 387, 825-850.