

DGS Corpus recorded 2010-2012

- Number of informants 330
- Controlled sample balanced for
 - gender
 - 13 regions
 - 4 age groups: 18-30, 31-45, 46-60, 61+
- Native and near-native signers



Data

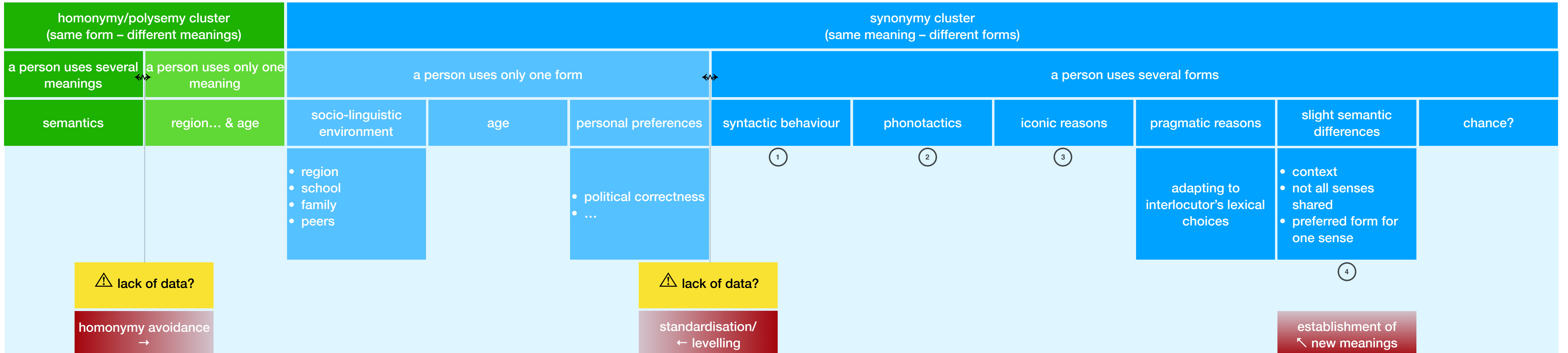
- Filmed conversations and staged communicative events (Nishio et al. 2010)
- Multi-modal corpus, lemmatised and accessible through iLex (Hanke/ Storz 2008)
- About 560 h footage of natural signing
- Lemmatised: 576.400 tokens (2019-09-23)

Starting Point

- The size of our corpus supports analyses of regional variation. Regional distribution of lexical variants of roughly synonymic sign clusters can easily be visualised on maps (cf. Hanke et al. 2017).
- However: Often several competing signs of a sign cluster are used within the same region and even by a single individual.

Question

- Looking beyond regional and sociolinguistic background: What other factors influence the lexical choice of signers?



Lexical Choice - Homonymy Avoidance

'Friday'
17 informants

'girl'
127 informants

'girl'
73 informants

Regional distribution of lexical variants found e.g. for signs for 'girl' seems to corroborate the hypothesis of homonymy avoidance (see Gillieron & Roques 1912, and for signed languages Boyes Braem 1981, Cuxac 2000).

But:

Corpus data also show lemma pairs or clusters of homonymous signs in the same region.

'class'
36 informants

'wood'
23 informants

'why'
14 informants

'woman' ~ (one of 10 lexical variants) compared to 'bread' ~ (one of 22 lexical variants)

'woman'
age group 61+, 5 informants

age group 46+, 23 informants

age group 31+, 34 informants

age group 18+, 49 informants

'bread'
age group 18+, 19 informants

Apparent time map (cf. Hanke et al. 2017) of one variant sign for 'woman' also may suggest that homonymy avoidance plays a role in regional language change. In Bavaria and Hesse the distribution of this meaning seems to be blocked by a homonymous sign for 'bread'.

Lexical Choice - within Semantic Clusters

Synonymy cluster for 'speak, talk, say, language'

- 5 different signs located at mouth (similar iconic motivation)
- Includes 2257 tokens from 293 persons in the corpus
- Overlapping meanings
- No clear regional distribution: several signs used in each region
- Assumption: slight meaning differences
 - investigation: closer look at use by one person "signer X" reveals use of different forms for different meaning aspects for this one person

	TO-SAY1		TO-SPEAK1		LANGUAGE1		LANGUAGE2		LANGUAGE3	
	corpus	signer X	corpus	signer X	corpus	signer X	corpus	signer X	corpus	signer X
tokens	1529	17	372	5	296	6	191	7	169	0
mouthing include forms of	sagen	sagen	sprechen, sagen	sprechen	sprache, sprechen, sagen	sprache, sprechen	sprechen, sprache	only mouth gesture	sprechen	
predominant meaning as used by signer X	independent of hearing status or language used: introducing the content of an utterance, citation or opinion of somebody, e.g. 'she said ...'; focus on content		hearing person speaking in a spoken language to Deaf person(s), some using especially articulated lip movements or supporting their speaking by gestures; focus on manner of (visible) articulation		reference to specific (spoken) language(s); Deaf person speaking a spoken language; focus on ability to speak		hearing person(s) use spoken language while Deaf person(s) present do not have access to the content (usually in group situations such as school or in mixed groups); focus on inaccessibility of content		not used by X	

Synonymy cluster: TOGETHER

TOGETHER1A + 2 variants

TOGETHER3A

TOGETHER6

TOGETHER-PERSON1

	552	230	39	126
token count	552	230	39	126
semantic difference	together: in a group	together: two persons	together: two persons/ two parties (abstract)	together: two persons
polysemy	'group' (328 corpus tokens), 'community' (43 corpus tokens)	'with' (1075 corpus tokens)	'with' (31 corpus tokens), sign becoming obsolete	morphologically related signs: TO-ACCOMPANY1A, TO-SEPARATE4B
syntactic behaviour	spatial modification (1 locus)	deictic use, spatial modification (2 loci)	spatial modification (1 locus)	spatial modification (1 or 2 loci)
iconicity	depicting handshake: size & shape	no depicting handshake		depicting handshakes: '2 persons'

- Contrastive analysis of meaning cluster
- Individuals using several items of a cluster tend to distinguish between different senses and functions

Conclusion:

- Looking into individual language use can help to find usage distinctions in semantic clusters. Results need to be validated against a larger number of corpus informants: Across informants, more meaning overlaps can be observed.
- Apparent time only allows a rather coarse diachronic view on the data, competing processes like establishment of new meanings and levelling would need a finer granularity on the timeline to be separated. Exact synonyms (lexical variants) are rare, if not regionally distributed.
- Homonymy avoidance cannot be claimed as a general rule, but we find data fitting the pattern.

Political Correctness / Age Variation

In the case of 'Africa' the preferred use of a lexical variant AFRICA1 (used by 21 informants) in comparison to AFRICA2 (used by 4 informants) is attested.

This is a case of age variation. AFRICA2 apparently is becoming obsolete. This may be due to the fact that it is perceived as politically incorrect.

Use of signs for 'Africa' by age groups: 25 informants (with 43 tokens)

Legend: 18-30 (light), 31-45 (medium), 46-60 (dark), 61+ (darkest)