

B4: Sentence types in German Sign Language (DGS): Manual and non-manual components

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For DGS, the modular interaction between morphology/morphosyntax and phrase structure only recently has found scientific interest (cf. Leuninger & Happ, 2005; Leuninger, 2006; Vorköper & Happ, 2006). This is in sharp contrast with the large body of studies related to e.g. American Sign Language. One of the most complex research domains concerns the syntactic derivation of wh-questions, topics, and focus. Various partially contradicting hypotheses have been put forward in this respect (cf. e.g. Petronio & Lillo-Martin, 1997; Neidle et al., 2000), concerning f.e. the syntactic base position of wh-operators or the status of so-called double questions. In DGS, these wh-doubling also exists:*

- Wh-question
- (1) WANN SIE-ALLE GEBÄRENSPRACHE LERNEN WÜNSCHEN WANN
Lit: When all of you sign language learn want when
“When do all of you want to learn sign language?”
(*prosodic marking: constricted eyebrows)

For DGS, it seems uncontroversial that wh-questions are semantically comparable to focus constructions, but focussed elements generally do not occupy left periphery positions (cf. Vorköper & Happ, 2006), whereas topics appear there:**

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- (2) BUCH, DANIELA LIEST
(* prosodic marking: raised eyebrows, short pause between the topic and the rest of the clause)

As the transcription shows, non-manual markings stretch over clauses (1) or smaller constituents (2).

In this project, the interplay between manual and non-manual syntactic components will be explored for DGS and other sign languages (e.g. Irish Sign Language). The leading research questions are as follows:

1. Relation of linearity and simultaneity in phrase structure
2. Grammatical status of non-manual markings (e.g. PF-spell-out of CP-related constituents, subcategorization of complement clauses, modals)
3. Differentiation of focus and topic
4. Scopal relations (e.g. operator-variable binding)
5. Typological properties of signed and spoken languages

Method

There already exists a large body of spontaneous signed language (stemming from a research project of Helen Leuninger supported by the German Science Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft): Slips and their repairs: German Sign Language vs. Spoken German; cf. Leuninger et. al., 2004). Further spontaneous data (e.g. discourse data) have to be collected. Besides this data class, experimentally induced production und perception data will be collected (including probably grammaticality judgements and neuropsychological data, the latter in cooperation with Prof. Dr. Sireteanu, Max-Planck-Institute for Brain Research, Frankfurt (Max-Planck-Institut für Hirnforschung)).

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