SLCN workshop 3: Annotation
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Transcribing features of unplanned signed discourse: How to deal with unpolished thoughts and sentences

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Project „Sign language texts“
www.sgw.hs-magdeburg.de/dgstxttyp/

Project – two aims:
1. digital library of German sign language (DGS) texts
2. classification of text genres in DGS

One point of interest:
difference between planned (formal) and unplanned (informal) discourse

→ planned discourse here means texts which provide political or juridical information

→ planned discourse like poetry, jokes or fairy tales has not been taken into consideration yet

Presentation will focus on glossing problems at lexeme, sentence and discourse level
Classification of formal vs. informal signed discourse possible by

- differences between situations and contents,
- different occurrences of linguistic and communicative features

→ articulation of signs: careful and complete vs. casual or "wrong" articulation

→ different degree of care in constructing sentences:
  - identification of sentences is relatively easy in planned discourse,
  - difficult in unplanned, informal discourse (due to "on-line syntax": break-ups - "anacoluthon", false agreements etc.)

→ differing frequency of (manual) gestures:
  - communicative and linguistic functions of manual gestures at sentence and discourse level seem to be more important in planned/formal discourse than informal discourse
Significance for discourse analysis:

distribution of gestures differ as well as “mistakes” at sign or sentence level

→ possible criteria for identification of text types

these issues are normally not considered relevant

→ only rough conventions or no convention at all

Remarks concerning manual gestures (“palm-up”, “clasped hands” and “arms hanging down”):

„palm-up“
- relatively often used in planned discourse to mark the end of a thematic chunk;
- also at the beginning of a thematic chunk
- less often used in informal than formal discourse
  → only used as a marker for the end of a thematic chunk

„clasped hands“
- mark the end of a thematic chunk;
- less turn-yielding quality than the “palm-up” gesture;
“arms hanging down” (considered a manual “zero-gesture” only if the same signer continues to sign):

- only in planned discourse
- used in monologic discourse as an end-marker of a thematic chunk
- when used in planned dialogic discourse, it seems to signal that the signer does not want to maintain the turn;

Individual preferences for the use of “palm-up”, “clasped hands” or “arms hanging down” to mark the end of a thematic chunk

[see overview for details; please note, that only the forms and distribution of different gestures are given – not all the possible endmarkers are represented; furthermore, gestures may have other functions than the above mentioned]

**GESToff (palm-up)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. interactive offer to give feedback</td>
<td>→ planned/unplanned discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. end of thematic chunk/utterance</td>
<td>→ planned/unplanned discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. opening of thematic chunk/utterance</td>
<td>→ only planned discourse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**GESThalt (clasped hands)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. end of thematic chunk/utterance</td>
<td>→ planned discourse (monologue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. disclaimer of turn-maintaining</td>
<td>→ planned discourse (dialogue)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**GESToff + GESThalt**

(*GESThalt+GESToff*)

<table>
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<th>Function</th>
<th>Distribution</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. turn-yielding</td>
<td>→ planned discourse (dialogue)</td>
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</table>

**GESTnull (arms hanging down)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. disclaim of turn-maintaining</td>
<td>→ planned discourse (dialogue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>persons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. end of thematic chunk</td>
<td>→ only planned discourse (monologue) by standing signer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>standing signer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- arms hanging down are transcribed as GESTnull only if the same signer continues to sign (not when a turn-change takes place)
- no verification of GESTnull for sitting signers in planned discourse, yet

**Frequency:**
less occurrences of GESToff in utterance final position in unplanned private conversations than in planned discourse;  

**GESToff as an opening signal** is only used in planned discourse;  

**GESThalt and GESTnull combined** function as end signal and occur only in planned discourse

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**Focus on two phenomena:**

1. divergence (variance)/inconsistency (discontinuity)/incorrect/inaccurate signs  
   - at the level of lexeme  
   - at the level of sentence  
2. manual gestures
Lexeme level:

1. divergence of hand forms and location
2. one/two hands
3. height of hands (in case of symmetrical two-handed signs)
4. reduced/fragmentary signing

1. Divergence of hand forms and location

In case of any deviation from the regular form of the sign, “*” is put before the gloss, for example: *GLOSS
1. Divergence „*“

*BERLIN  DEAF
2. One/two hands

In case of producing a two-handed-sign with only one hand, e.g. TEACHER, “-" (minus) is put before the gloss: -GLOSS

If a one-handed-sign is done with both hands, “+” (plus) is put before the gloss, for example: +GLOSS
3. Height of hands

Producing a two-handed symmetrical sign but positioning the hands at different heights, e.g. TEACHER, right hand positioned at normal height and left hand positioned at the height of waist, “/” (slash) is put before the gloss:
/GLOSS

3. Height of hands „/“

/HOME /CAT
4. Reduced/fragmentary signing

If a sign is produced very fast or discontinued, the gloss is enclosed in brackets:
(GLOSS)
Sentence level:

1. incomplete sentences
2. sentences intermitted by parentheses
3. false starts

1. Incomplete sentences

Sentences show a break in their grammatical construction or are completely abandoned:

three minuses (---) are noted down in the sentence line
1. incomplete sentence

Additional information is inserted.

“Insertion” is noted down in the sentence or comment line.

2. Parenthesis

Additional information is inserted.
2. parenthesis

Signers have difficulties in starting their sentences (different from incomplete sentences)

False starts are noted down in the comment line
3. false start

Manual gestures:

1. palm up

GESToff
Manual gestures:

2. clasped hands

Manual gestures:

3. arms hanging down: GESTnull
Conclusions for text linguistics:

1. “Mistakes” at the lexical or sentential level are indications of the problems arising during spontaneous language-production (“online-syntax”):
   → Different occurrences signal different production conditions (comparable to the difference between spoken and written discourse).

2. Manual gestures display a surprising frequency and variety in planned discourse in comparison to unplanned discourse:
   → In order to understand the pragmatic and grammatical functions in different types of discourse, we have to transcribe gestures carefully.

Thank you!