

What's so special about agreement in German Sign Language?



subject and object agreement

- In most languages that have agreement verbs agree with the subject:

Der Mann legt das Buch auf den Tisch.

‘The man puts the book on the table’

- Only some languages such as Lakhota or Swahili have subject and object agreement:

(**Miyé**) mathó ki hená na-wíčha-wa- xʔu
 (1sg) bear the those stem-3plOBJ-1sgSUBJ-hear

Ni- me-**ki-** ona (kisu) **Ni-** me-**vi-** ona (visu)
 1sgSUBJ-ASP-1sgOBJ-see (knife) 1sgSUBJ-ASP-1plOBJ-see (knives)

subject and object agreement

- in spoken languages object agreement is only possible, if there is subject agreement as well
- in sign languages if there is one agreement slot: object agreement takes precedence and if there are two: subject agreement is optional

Person-agreement-marking (PAM)

- In most languages auxiliaries express Tense-Aspect-Modality (TAM):

Yesterday I **would have been** swimming.

- But DGS and other sign languages such as Catalan SL or Greek SL use auxiliaries for Person-Agreement-Marking (PAM):

MANN INDEX_{3a} FRAU INDEX_{3ab} MÖG **3aPAM3b**

‘The man likes the woman’

Characteristics of PAM

- source for the agreement auxiliary:
the noun PERSON
- Baby-C handshape, mouthing /auf/ which is usually used for adjectival predicates and seems to disappear
- characteristics of the noun PERSON that make it plausible as a source of grammaticalization:
 - signed in neutral signing space with simple downward movement: beginning and endpoint not lexically specified
 - orientation and handshape are favourable
 - only semantic information: +human

Verb types in DGS

- plain verbs
 - cannot agree
 - ICH MEINE MUTTER **MAG**
 - ‘I like my mother‘
- spatial verbs
 - agree with locations
 - ICH ZOO_A **GEHENA**
 - ‘I go to the zoo‘
- agreeing verbs
 - agree with subject and object or source and goal
 - FRAU INDEX_{3a} MANN INDEX_{3b} **3aHELFEN3b**
 - ‘The woman helps the man‘

The use of PAM

- PAM is used optionally with plain verbs and agreement verbs

ICH MEINE MUTTER MAG 1PAM_{3a}

FRAU INDEX_{3a} MANN INDEX_{3b} HELFEN $3a\text{PAM}_{3b}$

- factors that favour PAM:
 - body-anchoring of the verb
 - > 1PERS.OBJ agreement of the verb is impossible
- INDEX_{3a} PAM_1 HASSEN
 ‘He/She hates me’
- emphasis, ‘loud’ and clear articulation

Master's Thesis - two hypotheses

1. The use of PAM is constrained by the animacy of the syntactic object that it refers to
2. There is a difference in acceptability concerning the use of PAM with agreeing verbs in their agreeing versus their citation form

Design: online experiment

Master's Thesis - hypothesis 1

- animacy hierarchy:
domestic animal > objects of particular interest to the
syntactic subject > inanimate objects
- 12 plain verbs in stimulus sentences with and without
PAM
ICH MEIN MOTORRAD LIEBE 1PAM3a
'I love my motorbike'
ICH MEIN HUND LIEBE
'I love my dog'

Hypothesis 1 - argument selection

- verbs:

compatibility with animacy scale

MÖGEN, LIEBEN, KENNEN, WARTEN,
INTERESSIEREN, SORGEN, KUMMER, SAUER,
STOLZ, SUCHEN, VERGESSEN, ZUFRIEDEN

Hypothesis 1 - argument selection

- arguments:

domestic animal:

HUND, KATZE, KUH, PFERD, KANINCHEN,
HAMSTER, WELLENSITTICH, PAPAGEI, MAUS

inanimate objects that are of importance or value
(material or personal)

HANDY, COMPUTER, ARMBANDUHR, AUTO,
FAHRRAD, HALSKETTE, BRIEFTASCHE, POKAL,
AKTENTASCHE, MOTORRAD, URKUNDE,
MEDIKAMENT

Hypothesis 1 - argument selection

inanimate objects

TASSE, RUCKSACK, SCHRANK, PUPPE, KISTE,
KOPFKISSEN, KERZE, GLAS, FLASCHE, PAKET,
REGENSCHIRM, BALL, SCHUH, SPIEGEL

Hypothesis 1 - control condition

- If there are animacy effects: Is this a general condition on agreement?

control verbs:

clear movement path or orientation change

ANSEHEN, ABHOLEN, SCHIMPFEN, BESCHÜTZEN,
MESSEN, FILMEN, BEOBACHTEN, BELEIDIGEN,
KRITISIEREN, HASSEN, BESPUCKEN, LOBEN

Hypothesis 1 - filler stimuli

- sentences that contain syntactic mistakes such as word order SVO

Master's Thesis - hypothesis 2

- There is a difference in acceptability concerning the use of PAM with agreeing verbs in their agreeing versus their citation form
- 16 verbs in agreeing or citation form, with and without PAM

FRAU INDEX_{3a} MANN INDEX_{3b} ZETTEL **GEBEN**

'The woman gives the note to the man'

FRAU INDEX_{3a} MANN INDEX_{3b} ZETTEL **GEBEN 3aPAM3b**

FRAU INDEX_{3a} MANN INDEX_{3b} ZETTEL **3aGEBEN3b**

FRAU INDEX_{3a} MANN INDEX_{3b} ZETTEL **3aGEBEN3b 3aPAM3b**

hypothesis 2 - argument selection

verbs that take human subjects and objects
clear movement path or orientation change

BESCHIED, HELFEN, ERKLÄREN, UNTERRICHTEN,
LEIHEN, KRITISIEREN, BESUCHEN, SCHENKEN,
ÄRGERN, GEBEN, EINLADEN, ANRUFEN,
ANTWORTEN, FRAGEN, BEEINFLUSSEN, ZEIGEN

hypothesis 2 - argument selection

subjects and objects:

MANN, FRAU, MUTTER, VATER, KIND, SOHN,
BRUDER, SCHWESTER, PROFESSOR, STUDENT,
LEHRER, MÄDCHEN, JUNGE,
KRANKENSCHWESTER, ÄRZTIN, KOLLEGE

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