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Research Question

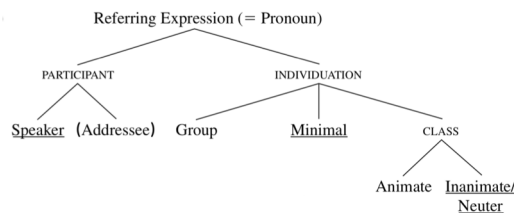
Background: The analysis of (A)SL pronouns [IX] is controversial. Data from sign language acquisition can provide a new kind of evidence.

Despite surface similarities, points with different functions are acquired differentially (L-M & CP 2018).

- Do children acquire ASL pronouns as predicted by the cross-linguistic feature hierarchy proposed by Harley & Ritter (2002)?

Method

- Analysis of corpora of naturalistic spontaneous production data from 4 deaf children acquiring ASL from deaf parents [the SLAAASh project]
- All instances of children's pointing (IX) coded for referent
- FRU (First of Repeated Uses) calculated as measure of acquisition
- Binomial test to determine significant differences, taking into consideration relative frequency



Child	Age range	# sessions	Total IX
ABY	1;05-3;00	30	2295
JIL	1;07-3;00	37	2447
NED	1;06-3;00	25	1620
SAL	1;07-2;10	18	2769

Proposed modification of H&R feature hierarchy for ASL

Results

- The 4 children each showed a different timeline for acquisition, but they all followed the same acquisition sequence:
 - IX to inanimate objects is always present from the first observation.
 - IX to 1st person is either present from the first observation or is acquired earlier than IX to any other animate referent.
 - IX to 2nd and 3rd person appear later and are very infrequent.
 - IX to plurals referents are generally later and also infrequent.



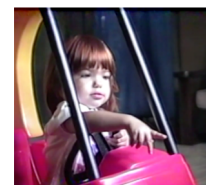
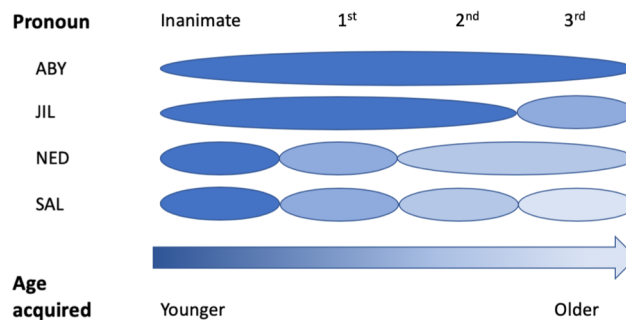
ABY (1;10) IX_1



NED (2;04) IX(3rd)



JIL (1;10) IX(2nd)



SAL (1;09) IX(inanimate)

Discussion and Implications

Our data support a modified Harley & Ritter (2002) hierarchy, with two considerations.

- It has been argued that ASL does not mark a grammatical distinction between 2nd and 3rd person (Meier 1990). On this view, consistent with data from ABY and NED, the Addressee node might not be activated in ASL, as indicated in the proposed hierarchy by the notation (Addressee). Alternatively, consistent with the data from JIL and SAL indicating a difference, there could be simply massive syncretism in the system.
- The feature system and acquisition timeline of our ASL data distinguish between animate and inanimate pronouns, although it has not been claimed in the literature that this animacy distinction is grammaticalized. The findings here suggest that searching for such possible grammatical distinctions would be a fruitful direction for future research.

Selected References

Cormier, Schembri & Woll 2013. Pronouns & pointing in sign languages. *Lingua*, 137, 230- 247.
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 Meier 1990. Person deixis in American Sign Language. In Fischer & Siple (Eds.), *Theoretical issues in Sign Language Research*. Vol. 1. (pp. 175-190). Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

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